

Hunter S. Thompson and the American Carnavalesque

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A Thesis Presented to

The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European
Languages

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the MA Degree

Autumn 2014

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2014

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<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Abstract

In this thesis I look into the carnivalesque aspects in Hunter S. Thompson's *Hell's Angels*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and *The Great Shark Hunt*. I explore the ways Thompson challenges established views of agency and the self in modern times through his representation of otherwise ignored aspects of conventional society. I ground my comparative analysis of his texts on the rhetorical devices put in play by polyglossia, satire and the grotesque. I demonstrate how Thompson's narrative strategy functions as a shock treatment on bourgeois sensibilities to contribute to a stagnant social discourse. Essential to the American Carnavalesque is how the performance of the self is affected by external influence and social aspirations, and Thompson enacts with self-reflexive humour his assessment of the state of modern civilization, in which people perform meaning to the extent of absurdity, the author included. In these three books Thompson engage into a celebration of the American Carnavalesque in its meaninglessness, by tearing down illusions and self-deceits, which in the end stands as a necessary acknowledgment of the post-modern social condition.

Acknowledgments

There are many people to whom I am grateful after the long but rewarding process of my thesis writing.

My supervisor, Rebecca Sherr, demonstrated patience and supportiveness along the way, and gave me constructive feedbacks which helped me to stay on track. For this I am very grateful.

Also important has been the sense of community here at the University of Oslo, and while we worked hard to get to the end, the conversations with and support from my fellow students were priceless. Thanks especially to Maria Nedregård, Erik Holsvik Opsal and Kjetil Albertsen.

Throughout this process I have received much help and feedback from my cousin, André Lauritzen, and it meant a lot.

Last, but not least, I want to give my appreciation to my mother, Karin, my brothers, Bjørn Ivar and Geir Magnus, and my sister, Astrid. Your support has been a great comfort- and- you are great.

Definitely last, I wish to express how challenging but very interesting and engaging it has been to write about Hunter S. Thompson and the American Carnivalesque, as I find his works to encourage afterthought on multiple levels, especially in their uncompromising rhetoric of grotesque humour. It has been a fun journey, and worth all the time it took.

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1 Introduction

“He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man” - Dr.
Johnson

These are modern times, and the world is full of contradictory voices and subcultures that have their own concept of standards and meaning. All these different cultural voices seek their ideal lives side by side, in the same block, in the same neighbourhood and in the same workplace, each with their own convictions and ideas of self-asserting truths. Capitalism has enabled men and women to gain material wealth based on hard work, and it is all up to the individual how he or she makes up her own life. Within this performative reality, everything should be attainable, and distinctions of high and low are in constant negotiation. There are many small narratives out there due to the global multicultural state of affairs, and the representation of all these smaller parts of the whole make up the mosaic of a nation of numerous voices, that all affect the totality of the everyday enactment of culture. There are channels of information that provide society with regular updates on events that take place, and these mediums have as a goal to inform citizens of who is doing what and who disagrees with whom in economical and power spheres. Jean Aitchison writes of news that “[it] is likely to be events which re-affirm accepted values in the society in which the readers live.”¹ But whose ideology rules the day, and who is left out of the equation – being the paradigm in which socially acceptable behaviour is enlisted and tolerated? These questions are posed and performed by Hunter S. Thompson in his works by either telling the story of people who have either fallen out of the equation, or himself acting out the extremes of social boundaries, thus providing an incentive to take a look at the discourse of individual autonomy in the face of accepted social boundaries. The newsworthiness of Thompson's works reads more as a questioning of accepted values, and not a re-affirmation of them.

In this thesis I will analyze and discuss how Hunter S. Thompson challenges traditional concepts of decency and the self in a society where narrow categorization compromises individual agency and spirit in order to promote and maintain a stable, productive and powerful state position. Thompson launches a new journalist shock treatment

¹ Jean Aitchison.» *The World Weavers- Newshounds and Wordsmiths.*» Cambridge. Cambridge University Press: 2007., p198

onto bourgeois society's sensibilities, in order to shed light on the hilarious absurdities in the established cultural self-assertiveness. He demonstrates in his works both indirectly and directly how the greater society effects individuals, leaving them with few choices with which to act according to, and his works can criticise how these few choices make society into one that is dull and stagnant, thereby making individuals into passive consumers and not active participants on their own terms.

Personal freedom holds a high position in American culture, and Thompson demonstrates an urge to preserve his, while at the same time making a social critique with his actions and behaviour, which I will look into further by discussing his narrative techniques. Thompson is dealing with these philosophical issues in different ways in the three publications of his that I will examine and analyze, *Hell's Angels*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and *The Great Shark Hunt*. The last publication is a book in which a majority of his published articles from different newspapers and magazines are gathered in one piece. Thompson wrote with the license of being a journalist, thus he acquired the authority to cover events, and he made use of fictional devices in order to create vivid descriptions of the experiences he had during his career, and of the people he met during his 'gigs', as he liked to call them. Not too many scholars have found Thompson's works to be of academic interest, as he has been labelled an author of entertainment rather than having something to contribute to social discourse. Dwight MacDonald judged the merging of fact and fiction in new journalism to be purely playful and sensationalist, rather than producing serious discussions on society;

'A new kind of journalism is being born, or spawned. It might be called 'parajournalism', from the Greek 'para', 'beside' or 'against': something similar in form but different in function. As in parody, from the *parodia*, or counter-ode, the satyr play of Athenian drama that was performed after the tragedy by the same actors in grotesque costumes. Or paranoia ('against besides thought') in which rational forms are used to express delusions. Parajournalism seems to be journalism - 'the collection and dissemination of current news' - but the appearance is deceptive. It is a bastard form having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction. Entertainment is the aim of its producers, and the hope of its consumers.'²

This comment came as a response to the works of Tom Wolfe in 1965, who wrote his works with a similar approach, and is put in the same category of New Journalism as Hunter S. Thompson. I will analyse Thompson's works with the exact literary devices by which his

2 Dwight Macdonald. 'Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe & his Magic Writing Machine'. *The New York Review of Books*, August 26, 1965 Issue. Web. Accessed October 23, 2013.
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1965/aug/26/parajournalism-or-tom-wolfe-his-magic-writing-mach/>

literary style was dismissed by his contemporaries; satire through parody, grotesque realism and the collection of news through the blending of contrasting voices and social affiliations. I suggest that these narrative devices put together serve as a personal expression of questioning the synthetic structures in the contemporary social fabric, and explores the possibilities for a recontextualisation of the self in society, not simply entertainment in order to saturate people's need for pastime leisure. These narrative devices work on the texts not only by distorting the agreed notion of common sense, but additionally function to shock people into awareness, and active reflection upon ideas of correctness and truth. Whether Thompson's contribution to cultural assessment carries actual relevance in a public discourse is questionable, and ready to be analysed, but never the less his works stands in retrospect as an insight into the psyche of dissenters of the cultural fabric in the 1960s and 70s.

I will examine the narrative devices Thompson used in order to express his personal interpretation of the state of American culture, while creating for himself the means and opportunity to perform individuality next to and along with it. Performing as a journalist, Thompson highlighted in his works mostly alienated subjects, and the issues he was concerned about were, to a large extent, the considered and actual moral degradation of his subjects, and just as often himself.

1.1 The Works in Issue by Hunter S. Thompson.

I will conduct a close reading of *Hell's Angels*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *The Great Shark Hunt*, which in their different manners speak of and represent Thompson's personal critique, but also celebrate American society.

Hell's Angels, the novel, was published by Random House in 1966, but before that, the story came out as an article on May 17 in 1965 in *The Nation*, a newspaper that offered Thompson a hundred dollars to comment on the actuality of The Lynch Report, which assessed the criminal activities of the motorcycle gang. In the article, 'Motorcycle gangs: Losers and Outsiders', Thompson concluded; '*The Press says this...observation says this.*'³ The article opened up for additional commiserations, and Thompson was offered 1500 dollars to write a book based on his experiences with the Angels. In this book, Thompson attacks the representation of motorcycle gangs by the media and the government, and he criticises the inaccuracy of their invented image, which makes them into a hazard and enemies of stable society. Thompson makes use of satire, polyglossia and grotesque realism to demonstrate how

3 William McKeen. Outlaw Journalist- The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson.'London:Aurum Press, 2009.pp 97,99,101

society works on its individuals, claiming the right and insight to categorize them. Polyglossia and satire are the narrative devices that secure the drive in the book, and the grotesque is working by the shock reaction it creates. By using these shock tactics he manages, in my opinion, to exemplify and propose a different and straightforward approach to the assessment and evaluation of the individual's choices in society and to align them in the same quest for agency and self-fulfilment, by paying heed to stories untold in the greater narrative.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas was published by Random House in July 1972. As with the former work, this story also ran as an article in two parts in November 1971 in *The Rolling Stone Magazine*. *Rolling Stone* chose to run it after *Sports Illustrated* rejected it as having no relevance whatsoever to sports. In the book Raoul Duke and Dr. Gonzo, two seasoned drug dilettantes, are on an errand for a sports magazine to cover a desert motorcycle race in Las Vegas.⁴ As a literary work it speaks about the illusions of the American Dream as embodied in the simulacra of Las Vegas, a city that proposes unreal pleasure and a break from the real world, but paradoxically stands as the epitome of American values and aspirations. The work shows the disillusionment of actual reality imposed on alienated subjects that try to escape these impositions by exacerbating their control of their physical state.

The work speaks of an underlying disillusionment and despair on account of the two protagonists, approached with the means of black humour, crude descriptions of their physical and mental state as well as the surroundings, and the enactment of state controlled hypocrisy. These two drug infused characters seem innocent and genuinely disturbed in the way they deal with external social powers they cannot control, and in which they cannot recognise themselves. The grotesque imagery that Thompson uses in this work can be interpreted to signal the imposed distance between mind and body, high and low, and how this distance is encouraged by the official versions of reality, maintaining control and predictability. Thompson himself indulges literally in this synthetic distance, and the work is filled with a sense of cynical playfulness in the face of it. The black humour and the exaggerated mannerisms make it clear that Thompson is not exempt from this distance, but he is wryly manoeuvring himself in these socially imposed inhibitions, attempting to expose them for what they really are by acting as the trickster figure, a figure who transgresses society's laws but acting them out against them. This book is the one which reads as pure Gonzo in its entirety.

4 William McKeen. *Outlaw Journalist- The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson*. London: Aurum Press, 2009. pp 176,178

The Great Shark Hunt was published in 1979 and contains a selected amount of Thompson's articles previously run in different magazines and newspapers. The articles all comment on different aspects of American culture. The articles are all a legacy of the numerous and varied experiences Thompson made and wrote about during his career: the Kentucky Derby; Thompson's campaign while running for Sheriff in Aspen, or 'Fat City' as he wanted to rename it; or the white man's challenge in South America and so on. The scope is different in this last publication, in that many of the articles deal with America in relation with the world, and how western civilisation is building its hopes and values on misled conceptions of right and just behaviour, on materialistic values that overshadow humanistic values, on moral degradation performed in the name of progress, wealth and power, and how these aspects are present from top to bottom in the social hierarchy. Thompson's tone is more sober and critical in *The Great Shark Hunt*, but the American carnivalesque is nonetheless present in the numerous contrasting voices, in Thompson's coarse descriptions of his experiences, and in the black humorist vision and description and enactment of the state of things. This narrative position enables Thompson to look into the subject matters from the outside while actively participating on the inside. From the variety of his articles I will provide the empirical examples that support and demonstrates my reading of Thompson.

These are the three works I will build my argument on, and they are relevant in that their different foci all speak of the same thing: the questioning of social boundaries and their value, the ironic and satirical view on well-established notions of decency and the categorization of high and low, the naturalizing approach to seemingly alien behaviour and agency. Thompson offers a more inclusive assessment of the meaning of life, by opting for a real and genuine assessment of the self, and he asks the reader to join the ride, if she will. Thompson offers a recontextualisation of agency and social meaning based on the deconstruction of the image of established normality and thereby including excessive and abnormal behaviour into a site of discourse along with accepted behaviour, making his work into a celebration of all voices that ought to be heard.

1.2 Hunter Stockton Thompson's biography.

Hunter Stockton Thompson was born on July 18, 1937 in Louisville, Kentucky. He was born into a modest middle class family, and he demonstrated early on a propensity to act against the grain and gather people around him. William McKeen writes about Thompson: 'He was a pain in the ass. He was fearless. He was cruel, but also capable of great kindness.

He was a loyal friend. Near the end, he was frequently sentimental. Sometimes brusque and rude, he could also be a courtly Southern Gentleman.⁵ Thompson was nine years old when he had his first encounter with law enforcement, when the FBI accused him of having committed a federal offence, destroying a mailbox. Hunter did not get bullied into confession and claims himself that it was a confidence builder.⁶ His first experience with writing articles came in the military service, writing on sports for the *Command Courier*, where he found his verbal talents. However, the military style did not suit Thompson and he managed to get an honourable discharge in 1957.⁷ A career within journalism was now his preferred way of earning a living. After a long career as a public inspiration and annoyance, and indulging whatever fancy that took Thompson, including drugs and alcohol; Thompson's health considerably worsened and after a long period in a reduced physical state, he decided to kill himself, and put a gun in his mouth. This happened on Monday February 20, 2005. Ralph Steadman, Thompson's partner in design for over 35 years, described Thompson with the following characteristics; 'He was and is the enemy of stupidity, of brutality against the weak and silly. He stands for the antidote to the New Dumb.'⁸ These are fine words, but more than that they create the image of a man who spoke with a genuine voice, not fogged over by illusion. Thompson immersed himself in his personal Gonzo style, and stuck with it after he realized that he could get away with. In Thompson's biography, he is quoted to have said: 'People were calling it a tremendous breakthrough in journalism, a stroke of genius. And I thought, *What in the shit?*'⁹ The rest is history, and the road to fame was not clear cut but Thompson's person is embodied in the publications that I will analyse and discuss in this thesis.¹⁰

5 William McKeen. *Outlaw Journalist- The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson*. London: Aurum Press, 2009., p2

6 Ibid., p 12

7 William McKeen. *Outlaw Journalist- The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson*. London: Aurum Press, 2009, p 34

8 Ralph Steadman. *The Joke's Over- Memories of Hunter S. Thompson*. London: Arrow Books, 2006., p382

9 William McKeen. *Outlaw Journalist- The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson*. London: Aurum Press, 2009. p148

10 The rest of his bibliography is extensive; *The Curse of Lono* (1983), *Generation Swine: Tales of Shame and Degradation in the '80s* (1988), *Songs of the Doomed: More Notes on the Death of the American Dream* (1990), *Screwjack* (1991), *Better than Sex: Confessions of a Political Junkie* (1994), *The Proud Highway: The Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman, 1955-1967* (1997), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas and Other American Stories* (1997), *Mistah Leary, He Dead* (1997), *The Rum Diary* (1998), *Fear and Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist, 1968-1976* (2000), *Screwjack and Other Stories* (2000), *Kingdom of Fear: Loathsome Secrets off a Star-Crossed Child in the Final Days of the American Century* (2003), *Hey Rube: Blood Sport, the Bush Doctrine, and the Downward Spiral of Dumbness: Modern History from the Sports Desk* (2004), *Fire in the Nuts* (2004).

1.3 Covering reality and presenting it fictionally: New Journalism and Gonzo:

Hunter S. Thompson had a similar style and approach to covering events as the known New Journalists Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Jimmy Breslin, Truman Capote, and Gay Talese. How did these journalists exert their influence on the contemporary scene of American culture and journalism? The relevance in the style and technique has to do with the message of Thompson's work, by managing to contribute with a social critique through the means of a conventional medium, affecting the works in a way that there is no separation of the form and the message, the entirety of the work- the style and the meaning form a symbiosis by building upon each other. New journalism broke new grounds, and was thoroughly rejected by established voices within the business, but nevertheless the attention it got earned the style much consideration and a large audience. The discussion on whether new journalism was to be reckoned with was concentrated around these five techniques the new journalists made use of: First, Thompson and his contemporaries tried to go beyond the surface fact by explaining it in terms of what they saw, heard and felt surrounding the immediate object, and they sometimes linked these observations with facts of history, society and literature. All of these are presented; on the grounds of subjective opinion, which is clearly stated and understood. Second, they use metaphors to alter the experience beyond there and then. Third, the subjects are peripheral and not always significant in the larger context. Fourth, they demonstrate a disregard for accuracy by focusing on the mood, and some examples are not clear cut in terms of whether they are parody or plain spoofing; and fifth, the techniques, such as Thompson's satire, and grotesque realism, are not always clear in intent, but as I will discuss, serve to activate the reader's interpretive abilities and engagement.¹¹

Being a journalist, the access to other people's voices and points of view is embedded in the job description per se. Thompson goes out in the field and talks to people to figure out what is going on, and reading the polyglossia as a technique is helpful by showing how the cultural carnival is playing out on people, performing on them and himself, but also how the influence is received and appropriated. Thompson further shows how the subjects he presents close up actively negotiates the terms offered by the greater society, either by actively going against the grain, discovering a middle-way or working alongside the given conceptions, and thus achieving freedom as it is prescribed. However, by letting other voices into the discourse,

¹¹ Dennis E. Everette, L.Rivers, William. *Other Voices-The New Journalism in America*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2011. pp 16,17,18

voices not usually granted attention, the new journalist invites a more complex understanding of lived culture into the social debate. Thompson manages in my opinion is to show that the American carnivalesque is an aspect of modern American society, and the official version of an American stable society is not telling the whole story, given that there are a high number of personal convictions and contexts that are left out of the equation or even misrepresented. The absurdity of oversimplified notions of lawfulness, authority, righteousness and moral high ground is argued to be a prevailing aspect in all social strata of society, from high to low. The celebratory aspect of Thompson's works lie in the realisation of the multitude of voices, carrying within them a multitude of stories and contexts that are ready to be discovered. In order to redefine personal freedom and open up for diversity in society, these need to be represented. The celebratory aspect therefore carries the opportunity of affirming the representation of voices that each brings their flavour to the whole, so that the questioning of social boundaries might contribute to social discourse.

The fictional traits in New Journalism enables the original function of journalism to provide information to the people while simultaneously initiate a dialogue with the source of information, thereby removing its definite quality and enhance assessment and individual judgement of the subject in question.

I will demonstrate how this is described in each work of Hunter S. Thompson in their respective manner. Making use of the vast number of voices that are present in American society makes his works into a celebration of American culture, while challenging the understanding of what modern American culture is really valuing, beyond the surface facts. The idea of languages, or as I interpret them in this context – jargon, expressions and opinions- as social languages, is interpreted by Hirschkop and Shepherd in Brottman in the following terms: 'all languages...whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values.'¹²

1.3.1 Gonzo Journalism

Gonzo journalism is a term that has been attached to much of Thompson's work, and it is through this mirror that Thompson is distinguishing his voice from the rest of the class of New Journalism. It is within Gonzo that we find the narrative techniques that in the end make

¹²Nikita Brottman. *High theory, low culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print. p9

such a spectacle out of external reality, that the readers are forced or strongly invited to see themselves as a product of imposed values and standards, to such an extent that one no longer stops to reflect over the drawn image of society's ins' and outs'. Gonzo writing is where Thompson breaks free from all imperatives, inventing new phrases, lending an ear to hoodlums rather than government officials, drinking Wild Turkey to calm down the chaos of external influence, and suggesting radical alterations of local law making. The distinction between new journalism and Gonzo is suggested to be by James Green that;

*'the new journalists are the archeologists of the psychic structures buried beneath the taken for grantedness of everyday cultural forms', [while] the gonzoists amplify that taken for grantedness, warp it by making the ugly amusing, the figure a caricature and the narration and speculation looney.'*¹³

As with New Journalism, the prose and the rhetoric is openly subjective, biased and focused on marginal subjects, but Thompson often distorts or exaggerates his observations in addition, which places his fiction in a hinterland where excessive spoofing and serious thought meet which again makes it necessary for the reader to make a judgement of what he or she is actually reading and how the stories can be read in relation to real social issues. The first book, *Hell's Angels* reads as a more sombre work of new journalistic approach, but the Gonzo quality is lurking in the scenes when it comes to the themes and the examples that Thompson provides to illustrate his interpretation of social stigmatization. In *Fear and Loathing* Thompson takes off into the fiction of fantastic realism, self-parody and harsh and grotesque rhetoric, which is the reason his second work is appreciated as pure Gonzo. *The Great Shark Hunt* is made with a blend of Gonzo and new journalistic traits, as it follows Thompson's career from his first to last articles. However, Thompson's persona precedes his reading, so the Gonzo effect is present in most of his texts. James Green writes of the fantastic elements and abstract imagery:

'The fantasies and wild tangents are a necessary element in the cultural sanity derived from the gonzo mode. Cubism, Impressionism, and Abstractionism are close to gonzo, but Funk is dead on it.

*Thompson believes even though serious reporting may suffer, one has to let one's mind wander, let it go where it wants to. Although the analogies are false they help to illustrate.'*¹⁴

Thompson's tendency to exaggerate and arguably even invent situations functions thus as a part of his reality fiction as a device to illustrate and to make allegories of real

13 James Green. 'Gonzo'. The Journal of Popular Culture. Volume IX, Issues 1, (Summer 1975) pages 204-210. First published online: 5 March 2004. Accessed March 4, 2014. Web.

http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1975.0901_204.x/pdf . p206

14 James Green. 'Gonzo'. The Journal of Popular Culture. Volume IX, Issues 1, (Summer 1975) pages 204-210. First published online: 5 March 2004. Accessed March 4, 2014. Web.

http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1975.0901_204.x/pdf . p210

observations, thus taking a different look at what he observes. Gonzo journalism carries elements of wonder and bewilderment on taken for granted issues. These aspects of his writing make the end results as something one could have written in a personal journal: 'Pure gonzo comes off as diary, action and reaction.'¹⁵

At this rhetorical junction lies the possibility for a further analysis of works that appear to be intentionally provocative at best, but full of entertaining aspects, considered as low culture but really representing ordinary people and making everyday life into a site of discourse.

1.4 The American Carnevalesque; Polyglossia, satire and grotesque realism:

Polyglossia, satire and grotesque realism are three narrative techniques that build on concepts of social culture's coherence by distorting them and showing the alternative side of taken for grantedness in lived experience. These approaches provoke and engage so as to invite the readers into making conscious assessments of external influences based on the realization of how culture really works on them and shapes their behavioural pattern according to the established norms. Hiebert argues that 'with the collapse of meaning comes also the collapse of its opposite.'¹⁶ The collapse of meaningfulness works in my opinion to open up for a less rigid categorization of the self, by tolerating and embracing the diversity in people for their own sake. Thompson's works arguably offer an incentive to offer a renewed conception of how individuals within a culture can have the ability to act more freely and in accordance with the true matter of things, rather than on misconceived representations and passive acceptance of the status quo. In agreement with the interpretation of Ted Hiebert's *Becoming Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity*;

'A recombinant carnival that draws on concepts, reappropriates and recontextualizes them, in terms of possibilities rather than meaning. An ambivalence then towards the theoretical and historical contexts in which such discourse generally proceeds, not in order to deny meaning, but rather simply to acknowledge from the start a heteroglossic understanding of the world. And not just the world, but the self too.'¹⁷

The consequences of approaching the text as an attempt to stretch the social boundaries, makes Thompson's works partly into an experiment with the play of words upon

15 James Green. 'Gonzo'. The Journal of Popular Culture. Volume IX, Issues 1, (Summer 1975) pages 204-210. First published online: March 5, 2004. Accessed March 4, 2014. Web.

http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1975.0901_204.x/pdf . p206

16 Ted Hiebert. 'Becoming Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity', Performance Research, 8(3), pp 113-125, © Taylor & Francis Ltd 2003. Accessed March 4, 2014. Web.

<http://www.tedhiebert.net/site/downloads/writings/carnival.pdf> p113

17 Ibid. p113

actual performance, thereby creating a sense of innovation in terms of the possibilities of the self. When the experiment is grounded in lived reality, not in abstract thought, it amplifies the philosophical effect, and carries the possibility to actually question the absolute definition of truth and social experience.

1.4.1 Polyglossia in the text.

The unmasking of social languages is as already established a part of journalism, but the interpretation of society through the lenses of numerous points of views affects the text in its significance, by linking together seemingly contradictory aspects and perspectives. Nikita Brottman interprets Bakhtin, who coined the term polyglossia;

'...each level of polyglossia is linked to the next by a common folkloric laughter, whose roots go back deep into the pre-class folklore and which destroys traditional connections and abolished idealized strata, bringing out the crude, unmediated links between words and concepts that are normally kept very separate. Carnival, according to Bakhtin, represents the disunification of what has traditionally been linked, and the bringing together of that which has been traditionally kept distant and disunified.'¹⁸

The folkloric laughter is provoked by the linking together of separated ideas, which works on the texts by creating a distance to the enactment of these ideas and concepts, and that can be religion, politics, authority, or even pompous behaviour. The idealised strata are challenged by the employment of different points of views, and the way it functions in a text is to challenge the value of a uniform and universal ideal, by introducing voices that are at times conflicting, but building upon each other and forming an ideal that is open for additions and flexible in its interpretation. To apply the theory of polyglossia to new journalism and first-hand observation is a means to understand the carnivalesque quality, with an active participation in the deconstruction of greater society's social hierarchies.

The concept of polyglossia, also called heteroglossia, is based on the idea of dialogue, in which different voices in conversation build upon each other and create an altered level of discussion. These different voices carry within them their own history and way of looking at situations, and they can be effectuated throughout different means of communication. Communication happens in a conversation between several people, it can happen between genres which employ different techniques, or it can happen across linear spaces in time; from one utterance to another separated only by context and time, or across discourses.

Mikhail Bakhtin proposes in his assessment of history of discourse in literature and

18 Nikita Brottman. *High theory, low culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. p10

social life: 'Where languages and cultures interanimated each other, language became something entirely different, its very nature changed: in place of a single, unitary sealed-off Ptolemaic world of language, there appeared the open Galilean world of many languages, mutually animating each other.'¹⁹

Contemporary literature that employs not only the quality of the novel to present the actuality of different languages in discourses, but also the diverging social languages in people's everyday life, then disregards the illusion of social unity and dogmatism, but instead embraces the effects of polyglossia that opens up the text, the interpretation of it, and even the need for sealed-off notions of social values and ideas.

Words and concepts, normally distinctly opposite and conflicting, are brought together in a double performance act, and shown to stem from the same source; the human effort to create meaning. What polyglossia does to a literary text is to create a site for discussion in the text that is playing out on the reader, by revealing the relativity of all convictions, and gives heed to the perceptions that are felt and acted upon by individuals. It further carries an opportunity to draw the reader into the discussion, for the reader carries with him or her ideals and convictions of their own. The use of fictional traits to cover news and events resonates with how Bakhtin characterises the novelization of genres:

'They [other genres] become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the 'novelistic' layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self-parody and finally- this is the most important thing- the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present).'²⁰

Polyglossia then, brings to the fore the experience of individual space in society, removing the illusion of a given ideal to act by. I suggest then, that by using polyglossia in order to get a necessary distance and others' assessment of a concept or idea, has the ability to uncover social patterns, and the ability to realise that the established social structure is necessarily established, and those who fall on the outside are as much a part of the established social structure, as derivative of the self-same structure. The folkloric laughter arises when the contrastive voices together show how the myth of the establishment is contradicting itself.

Brottman further explains the use of polyglossia, both lived and textual, as self-

19 M.M.Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination- Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p65

20 Ibid. p7

regarding and highly conscious of the role of the writer, as the one who brings all these converging voices together, and he shows why this aspect is present in works of satires:

'Bakhtin's idea of carnival, both lived and textual, as the self-regarding parody of different language styles and levels of dialogue, and his description of the stock-in-trade carnival jester who has to be able to mimic birds and animals, and the speech, facial expressions and gesticulations of a slave, a peasant, a procurer, a scholastic pedant, and a foreigner are highly relevant to pop culture's current and continuous taste for impersonation and parody.'²¹

Impersonating other characters becomes a part of performing polyglossia, by acting out staged roles that are currently relevant on the contemporary scene. Performing and allowing a variety of voices and contexts to affect the character of the text takes the specific out of the equation, and rather leaves an open space in the text where perhaps a definite solution is expected, or even wanted. This is a radical aspect of the effect of polyglottic representation, and within the employment of this narrative device lies therefore various possibilities for the enactment of the self. As a theory, self-regarding humour and imitation enables the one doing the mirroring of the self, to explore the possibilities of other utterances, by claiming a distance to both oneself and to the object, and subject, in question. In the words of Ted Hiebert: 'A 21st century feast of fools, which negotiate its culture of boredom by carnivalizing the stage of its appearance.'²²

What remains is to discuss in what way the open space for the indenture of a liberated self does to the story.

1.4.2 The Rhetoric of Satire

Satire works on literary texts by employing exaggerated and distorted view on surroundings and experiences described in the text. According to Robert C. Elliott who has looked into the role of the satirist in society and argued his or her historical significance, interprets the impulse towards satirical depiction as verbal assault, employing wit to make the object of attack ridiculous. Referring to Sigmund Freud, Elliott establishes that wit 'affords us the means of surmounting restrictions and of opening up otherwise inaccessible pleasure sources.'²³

21 Nikita Brottman. *High theory, low culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. p11

22 Ted Hiebert. '*Becoming Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity*', *Performance Research*, 8(3).pp113-125, © Taylor & Francis Ltd 2003. Accessed March 4, 2014. Web.
<http://www.tedhiebert.net/site/downloads/writings/carnival.pdf> . p113

23 Robert C. Elliott. '*The Satirist and Society*.', *ELH*, Vol.21, No. 3 (Sept.,1954), pp 237-248. Accessed

Employing satire to express discontent with a specific or non-specific but deeply felt issue brings a certain amount of bewilderment in terms of who is the object of attack. This is often because it can involve the aforementioned self-regarding humour, and the spectacle created in satirical texts is often induced with coarse humour and ridiculous descriptions, thereby posing a challenge to the object under attack. It is liberating in the way that satire often deals with taken for granted issues that are firmly implemented in the social psyche, issues that the satirist interpret from a different viewpoint. The pleasure sources that Elliott mentions as the result of use of wit, is found in the liberating process of going against the grain that no longer fits the actuality of modern experience. The power of satire is argued to lie in the suspicion it creates due to its truth resemblance. Elliott writes of the satirist's role in term of his relationship with culture;

'He is of society in the sense that his art must be grounded in his experience as a social man; but he must also be apart, as he struggles to achieve proper distance. His practice is often sanative, as he proclaims; but it may be revolutionary in ways that society cannot possibly approve, and in ways that may not be clear even to the satirist.'²⁴

However, while the satirist claims an overarching viewpoint to support his verbal attack prompted by a forced distance, true satire works at its best in crude contact with the subject that is dealt with. The proper distance is achieved in the self-regarding parody, in the awareness of the one's own participation in the folly that is described. Where Elliot writes distance I interpret his intention to describe immediate self-awareness, and an inwards glance at the events that take place, by using wit. Bakhtin argues on the distancing effects of laughter:

'This is the zone of maximally familiar and crude contact; laughter means abuse, and abuse could lead to blows. Basically this is uncrowning, that is, the removal of an object from the distanced plane, the destruction of epic distance, an assault on and deconstruction of the distanced plane in general.'²⁵

In other words, distance from oneself but close contact with the subject at hand, with a satirical intent, and here Bakhtin assesses Menippean satire, in which laughter as a weapon is coarser and more powerful:

'The liberty to truly degrade, to turn inside out the lofty aspects of the world and world views, might sometimes seem shocking.[...] In Menippean satire the unfettered and fantastic plots and situations all serve one goal- to put to the test and to expose ideas and ideologies. These are experimental and

February 18, 2014.Web. [Http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871965](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871965) . p245.

24 Robert C. Elliott. ' *The Satirist and Society.* ', ELH, Vol.21, No. 3 (Sept.,1954), pp 237-248. Accessed

February 18, 2014.Web. [Http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871965](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871965) . p248

25 M.M.Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination- Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin.* Ed. Michael Holquist. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p23

provocative plots.²⁶

The former citations on satire together form and shape the basis of the verbal and positional approach taken by the satirist, in which humour is a defining aspect of the narrative techniques. Satire is based on a verbal assault that reconnects epic distance with contemporary reality, by uncrowning lofty world views and using shock tactics to expose the ideology that drives these. Thompson's role as a modern satirist is not imbued with pretentiousness, or Utopian ideals, though the ideal is where the indignation comes from. The role of the satirist is explained by the intent and the philosophical point of view of the critic:

'He is a man (women satirists are *very* rare) who takes it upon himself to correct, censure and ridicule the follies and vices of society, and thus to bring contempt and derision upon aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm. Thus satire is a kind of protest, a sublimation and refinement of anger and indignation. As Ian Jack has put it very adroitly: ' Satire is born of the instinct to protest; it is protest become art.'²⁷

This is the original point of departure for the impetus to write satirical texts, of which Thompson has appropriated his own critical stance with a contemporary point of view, bringing himself down or rather acknowledging his part in the society he reacts to. The curiousness lies in the way a contemporary satirist does not necessarily look down upon wrongdoings and flawed perception from a higher moral ground, but it is rather the man on the ground, with all his flaws and imperfections that claims the right to envision a more genuine and open social world on the basis of every man's and woman's imperfect human qualities, in my opinion.

1.4.3 The Grotesque as Mode of Communication

The third aspect of the American carnivalesque as descriptive tool to comment on society is the use of grotesque imagery and representation. Definitions of the term flourish, and Kathryn Hume chooses Wolfgang Kayser's formulations: 'the grotesque is the estranged world'; the grotesque is the manifestation of incomprehensible and impersonal forces; 'the grotesque is a play with the absurd'; and the grotesque tries to 'subdue the demonic aspects of the world.'²⁸

26 M.M.Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination- Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p26

27 J.A. Cuddon, (revised by C.E. Preston.) *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books, 1999. p780

28 Kathryn.Hume, *Aggressive fictions- Reading the Contemporary American Novel*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2012. p78

The grotesque as a term carries resonance with the idea of deformity and aberration, but grotesque as an adjective further builds on the notions of exaggeration, extravagance and excess. D. Edwards and Graulund identify the three modes of expression in how they contribute to mark where the boundaries lie:

"These three modes of expression often contribute to grotesquerie by expanding upon existing conventions; they are not engendered by an external disruption or an assault on harmony from the outside. Rather, exaggeration, extravagance and excess emerge from within the very boundaries, limits, laws and convention meant to resist disharmony."²⁹

To approach a text with an eye to the grotesque thus serves to comment on perverse forms of human behaviour and bodily excess, appropriated from within established and conventional forms of the individual performing his or her role in society. By enlarging an object, a concept or behaviour into the scope of a magnifying glass, one manages to inspect the matter up close and free from ornamental disguise. By this metaphor I mean that although distorted in representation, the subject of inspection carries within it traces of truth from which it was enlarged. The grotesque ignites feelings of disgust and alienation towards the described subject, and the representation manages therefore to uncover the borders of accepted and discarded notions of conventional standards.

Edwards and Graulund further argues that the discovery and the challenging of social boundaries can dissolve them by letting them affect one another;

"This erasure of common distinctions speaks to debates over stigmatization and normalcy, what it means to exist outside the norm, and what the norm is. After all, we must remember that normalization is a powerful discourse of control and institutionalisation, for dominant institutions sanction certain forms of normalcy, and this always comes at the expense of others, which are constituted by contrast as abnormal, inferior or even shameful. This lack of 'normalcy', indeed the very idea of normality itself, can lead to an uneven distribution of shame in people's lives, resulting in the negative consequences of exclusion, demonization and even violence."³⁰

The use of grotesque imagery or rhetoric is thus intended to provoke, and engages the reader into reflecting upon why the object of inquiry has a reserved place outside the norm, while simultaneously challenging notions of normality. The shame in being marginal of conventional norms is demonstrated by the use of the grotesque, and serves to question the humanity in excluding some while including the majority. On a philosophical level the exclusion of others comments on the primal behavior of civilized people, while civilization tries to rise above these primal aspects within human beings. The grotesque in literature

29 Justin.D. Edwards, Graulund, Rune. *Grotesque- the New Critical Idiom*. Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2013.

p66

30 Ibid. p9

serves thus to normalize abnormality, and to ground the human body in all its physical variations rather than create an ideal and supreme version of a perfect higher being driven by spiritual and pure thought. To present human experience through the lenses of the grotesque draws the question of stability and peace onto the scene of inquiry, and these examples dwell on the negative consequences of the concept of normalcy, and how this leads to aberrations in form and expression.

The use of grotesque imagery and rhetoric also functions as opposition against strict norms, and an attempt to recontextualize the old norms. The grotesque as rhetoric is comparative with national vulgar tone: unrefined and direct, and not the least specific and up close. The rhetoric ridicules the old by provoking unease and discomfort, and thereby questions the old truths of normalcy and conventionality. Kathryn Hume chooses to structure the grotesque into a tripartite metaphor:

'While many definitions [of grotesque] set up a binary opposition, they actually function, or can be parsed, in three parts, consisting of the opposed extremes plus the middle space in which they confront each other or merge.[...] In this way of conceptualizing the grotesque, we have to sets of values understood to oppose each other; in the space between grows a third possibility, the grotesque.'³¹

The grotesque is according to this structural understanding something that neither fits within nor without, and with this realization this rhetoric and imagery can create a renewed space for alternative experiences.

I will read the chosen works of Hunter S. Thompson by theoretically approaching the texts using these themes, to demonstrate how he expressed disillusionment with where society was going and how men and women were dealing with inhibiting alternatives within mainstream and conventionality, thus making American society the site of discourse on the social carnival of modern times.

³¹Kathryn Hume. *Aggressive fictions- Reading the Contemporary American Novel*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2012. p79

2 Hell's Angels – A strange and terrible saga.

'Were it not for the presence of the unwashed and the half-educated, the formless queer and incomplete, the unreasonable and absurd, the infinite shapes of delightful human tadpole, the horizon would not wear so wide a grin.- Fran Moore Colby, *Imaginary Obligations*.³²

The premise of the docudrama was intentionally to represent the real story about the motorcycle gang that was presented in media and by government officials to be nothing but a hazard to society. The approach set in motion by Thompson is therefore grounded in reality, and based on the actual experience he went through while travelling with the outlaws. It is therefore interesting to look at how he represented them, and which techniques he chose to represent the actuality of the problem. The fictional approach and techniques he used to create the atmosphere of storytelling and experience further affected the text in terms of setting the scene for a dialogue with the surroundings in the presence of the Angels. Thematically, much can be said about the motorcycle group that is coherent with Thompson's view on the status quo of society, and it is relevant to draw in the structure and beliefs of *Hell's Angels* to reflect Thompson's use of polyglossia, satire and the grotesque, in order to express Thompson's view of a society that reproduces itself. In other words, Thompson shows how the problem with the Angels cannot be interpreted as an isolated event, apart from the social reality in which the group performs. He manages to unveil how the American society in its treatment of subcultures ignores its own involvement and influence on the individual's choice in life and looks at the abnormality of it rather than acknowledging the social processes that shape people's lives. Subsequently, civilised society reproduces itself by not taking this aspect into consideration and thereby continues to take away the good name of deviants of the social norm, without losing its own good reputation as a free and liberal society.

In *Hell's Angels*, Thompson provides us with an example of a criminalized group, by pointing out the difference between their actual anti-social behaviour and the criminal character delegated and appropriated by them. One can easily make this into a documentary of how the group in question is revealed to fit in the dichotomy of outsiders and insiders. The story is made up by Thompson recounting a variety of small incidents that sums up the assessment of the final episode, in which he was happy to get out alive. The narration of the 'field-work' does uncover the usefulness of locating and establishing the margins of acceptable behaviour, but Thompson shows with his narrative approach how the almost

32 Hunter S. Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p140

theatrical behaviour of the Angels, and the behaviour of those who categorize them have basic similarities, whether it is reversed stigmatization of conventional society, as society does to the Angels, or whether the assumptions about alternative enactments of meaningful ideologies will always be irreverent of other peoples' agency. Inevitably, Thompson demonstrates an incapacity to fully understand and belong to a group that shares similar approaches to facing the constrictions of society, but ultimately proves to be different. Gary L. Kieffner argues in an article published in 'International Journal of Motorcycle Studies' exactly this failure;

"Throughout the book, there is also evidence of a profound failure to understand individual and collective self- perceptions of club members' role in society. Furthermore, the author refuses to give them any credit for human mental qualities such as thoughtfulness and rationality preferring, instead, to depict bikers as 'Cro-Magnon' or 'Sub-human'. In addition, drug dealing was not a condoned or sanctioned club-activity, regardless of this narcotically and alcoholically obscured, non-objective text's subsequent importance in the determination and formulation of governmental doctrine and myth."³³

The reception is based on the story as a pure account of social reality, and therefore Thompson is considered to come short of an authentic presentation of them. However, by looking at the story as part fiction, the chosen material enables the reader to distance herself from the blindness that affects the reflections on social connections by being too close to the material. The effect of Thompson's narrative techniques is the opportunity to distance oneself from the conceit of absolute true and rational behaviour in order to choose more freely and more consciously how to relate to society, with the advantage of an outsiders overview. Thompson might have exaggerated the characteristics of the members of the motorcycle group, for the purpose of shocking people into a renewed understanding of agency, thus the probable exaggerations were relevant by serving a cause.

Hell's Angels provided for Thompson an example that enabled him to confront the biased and often wrong categorization of subcultures, and at times the hypocritical attitude inherent in these categorizations that went unnoticed by most. Thompson's assessment was just as biased, showing how facts and information can perform different and incomplete truths. The media is the medium that has the ability to spread information to the entire populace in a country, and Thompson attacks how the spreading of information is handled, and attempts to tell the tale of America in his own vision, using the media to spread his idea of a more truthful image of American culture. This aspect is slightly paradoxical, for Thompson used the very same means of spreading his point of view as the media institution

33Gary L.Kieffner. 'Myth, Reality and Revenge in Hunter S. Thompson's *Hell's Angels*.' International Journal of Motorcycle Studies. July 2005. Web. Accessed March 25, 2014.
http://ijms.nova.edu/July2005/IJMS_RT.Kieffner.html

he attacked. In modern society, information is power, though, and Thompson's contribution to the conveyance of information arguably made its impact on the understanding of the concept of an institution giving information to people. The impetus for a personal and fictional rewriting of news and documentaries stemmed from a realisation that even facts could be misleading, and that news releases, press conferences and statements, not to mention reports, were often prepared and angled by the very men who were in power, which was problematic in terms of their natural bias and the realisation that they had interests to protect.³⁴ In this connection, using universally available channels of providing information and telling stories from lived experience, alludes to a satirising of the establishment, and liberates Thompson from the conventionalities within news-making. It is no wonder then that the reception concerning his news-worthiness was mixed and often sceptical.

Then why is it so that the textual docudrama carries resonance among readers; is it because Thompson after all confirms the incapacity of motorcycle groups to fit in, or does he not simultaneously put society's judges in the same category? I, as a reader of my time, assessed from the story that all contentious acts are to some extent ridiculous and absurd, and as I set out to demonstrate in this thesis, the modern carnival carries in itself possibilities to destroy meaninglessness by questioning meaning. It follows that in the attempt to destroy meaninglessness one is bound to provoke social forces trying to maintain meaning in the present status quo, and provocations have a tendency to get attention. After the questioning and ridiculing of meaningful ideologies and social parameters, comes the possibility of an invitation to reassess the dogmatic categorization of people's actions and beliefs, and thereby their range of agency. This aspect accounts for all members of society, also the object under scrutiny. However, while reading Thompson's works as a legacy from that time, and seeing him basing his observations on the narrative devices he uses, the works open up for a new discussion on moral and standard behaviour and choices in life. Throughout this chapter I will discuss and analyse how the use of these narrative techniques work within the text, allowing us to interpret Thompson's works in the light of postmodern ambivalent assessment of agency and performance of individuals in society, and a realization of how external influences shape free expression and social performance.

34 Dennis E. Everette, L. Rivers, William. *Other voices- The New Journalism in America*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2011. p2

2.1 Employing polyglossia in the process of discourse.

Thompson's voice and social role as a pioneer in journalistic representation is the one who makes the calls, and he functions as a mediator of contrasting voices, which again functions in the text as the representation of a myriad of social components in the whole social entity. The employment of diverse voices creates a notion of actual discussion and an attempt to agree on the status quo of culture, but it also makes the idea of agreeing on it into a difficult task, for Thompson shows that all voices carry within them their own concepts of meaningful values and the history of how these values were created into what they are today. To have a direct access to American voices, and to use these voices as a means of representation carries the possibility to directly affect the outcome of a discourse, for while the task of distributing knowledge about the best way to perform social advance and responsibility is delegated to appointed savants of social sciences, Thompson appoints this to people performing their everyday lives and not to the appointed ones. Here Thompson participated in Peter Whitmer's articulation of the rebellious spirit of the sixties in that the writers of the time participated in the attempt to 'seizing power and seeking to redistribute it to the point where power ceased to exist as an oppressive force.'³⁵

I interpret the use of polyglossia in *Hell's Angels* to create the awareness of a multitude of viewpoints, and that these need to be heard in order to reflect the entire picture of society's expectations and desires. By frequently using quotes by philosophers, authors and ordinary people, Thompson manages not only to connect social experience at a specific point in time, but also to anchor and celebrate the variety of voices out there, and establishes that the differences in people is a universal aspect, suggesting that more acknowledgement should be granted to these. Polyglossia works on several levels by connecting; different backgrounds, localities, ideologies, experience in time as well as in geographical surroundings. From this blending of difference rises a renewed understanding of social man and woman, not based on a single dominant mode of thinking, but on the basis of each individual experience. Furthermore, by generating a diversity of voices in the mapping of experience instead of relying on a single preferred voice – or institution- what follows is a reducing of shame or imagined incapability to fit in.

First I find the relevance in showing how the use of other people's thoughts works the text. Thompson draws in quotes from other contexts into a collage that is representative for an

35 Peter O. Whitmer, (with) VanWyngarden, Bruce. *Aquarius Revisited- Seven who Created the Sixties* Counterculture that changed America. New York: Citadel Press, 1991. piv

established way of thinking, and many of them, such as those by government officials, appear in *Hell's Angels* to demonstrate that strategies in politics are the same on the international scale as on the local scale. The collage is of Thompson's own making, so it thereby follows that he manipulates external sources to fit his own projection of a society that will sooner degrade diversity than make space for multi-cultural expressions.

In *Hell's Angels* the use of seemingly conflicting social languages are brought to the fore by the representation of both the Angel's point of view, and with the conventional society's point of view, supposed to be mitigated by the press and government officials. Thompson writes about the conflicting experiences created by the attention brought on by the Lynch Report and the following exposure of the actions undertaken by the motorcycle gang by letting in the opinions of the Angel's, law enforcers, and common men and women. To connect the specific example of the gang with a general state of things during the times in question and with historical tendencies, Thompson also uses quotations and reflections from other philosophers and writers, to reanimate the links between the times and human history as well.

I will now provide four examples where polyglossia is a factor in the text, and discuss how it affects the overall recognition of a multiplicity of voices that affect American society as a whole, while not being presented as a social force in the national social psyche of the times.

The first example comes at the very beginning, before the story has even begun. This example sets the tone for the following events, and sets the premise for the employment of the effects of polyglossia on the whole text. *Hell's Angels* begins with a verse;

'In my own country I am in a far-off land
I am strong but have no force of power
I win yet remain a loser
At break of day I say goodnight
When I lie down I have a great fear
Of falling'
-Francois Villon

The verse is on a page of its own, and on the next page there is a headline; 'ROLL EM, BOYS.'³⁶

The beginning is sudden and suggests movement, and a diving in from the abstract

³⁶ Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p0

plane of universal thought to the raw reality of the American 1960s. The juxtaposing of poetic language and the more raw and vulgar American vernacular creates a suggestive mode and a mood of something about to happen, of action, immediacy, novelty, and not least, of optimism. Considering Bakhtin's idea of dialogue, the use of languages that are definitely apart shows how distinctly rhetorics are resonant with the mood of the times in which they were written. Bakhtin reflects on what it does to a language when it meets an older version of itself:

'At the same time two worlds are animating each other: a medieval one and a new folk-humanist one. We also hear the same old folkloric quarrel of old with new; we hear the same old folkloric disgracing and ridiculing of the old – old authority, old truth, the old word.[The influence] of other analogous phenomena indicate to what extent this process of interanimation of languages, the measuring of them against their current reality and their epoch, was a conscious process.[...] Laughter and polyglossia had paved the way for the novelistic discourse of modern times.'³⁷

A similar interanimation happens in the example I have given, by letting these two historically, linguistically and generically different modes of expression affect each other. This is where high and low meet and synchronize, connecting two different realms, and renewing their meaning and paying heed to both of them as equal contributors to a similar state of mind. However, at the same time there is a sort of ridicule of the presentation of possible outcasts in high verse in a passive mode, and the new and active vernacular drawing the reader into a contemporary reality that is better suited for the contemporary reader. The book expresses 'out with the old and in with the new', and I will argue that the example also normalizes the empirical background behind the imperative suggestion.

The juxtaposing is also a use of pastiche, which is explained by Frederic Jameson to involve a 'neutral practice of mimicry.'³⁸ I include this quality of the example for the reason that it is not necessarily with an eye to parody that Thompson begins the story in this way. The pastiche is also paving the way for something new, while acknowledging a connection with the past. In this sense, the polyglot quality of this example expresses that something new is on the horizon, with respect to the past.

So how does this example resonate with Thompson's critique with society's restrictions on the performing self? Because of the clear initiative to give the incentive for something new, in terms of rhetoric, it can also resonate with a desire to create a new point of view that

37 M.M.Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination- Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p82

38 Frederic Jameson. 'Postmodernism and consumer society.', ch 33, in Lodge and Wood (ed), *Modern criticism and Theory- A reader*. 3rd edition, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited., 2008. p545

is consistent with social reality in America in the 1960s. The optimism that is expressed in the joyful imperative suggestion has been recontextualised from the disillusionment of barely managing the existence on the outside in the poetic verse with which it was juxtaposed. The expressed optimism is also sentimentally attached but with a touch of irony to the past, thus giving the story a sense of relevance beyond the specific issue in time and space.

The second example of polyglossia from the story is found in the accidental meeting with a farmer in a general store in San Gregorio, where Thompson and his family overhear complaints about Ken Keesey and the Angel's gathering at his place in La Honda:

"That goddamn dope addict," said a middle-aged farmer. "First it's marywanna, now it's Hell's Angels. Christ alive, he's just pushin' our faces in the dirt!" "Beatniks!" said somebody else. "Not worth a pound of piss."³⁹

The farmer in this example can easily be reduced to be the voice of conventionality, as a representative of old rural ways of nurturing the land and social values, such as hard work and a sober take on life. The farmer stands in contrast with a subculture that seeks expansion of the mind and less social pressure to answer for one's own actions. This episode resonates with Nikita Brottman's reference to Bakhtin's interpretation of a multitude of voice in times of carnival: "The festivities associated with carnival are collective and popular; the sacred is profaned, and the relativity of all things is proclaimed. At the time of carnival, everything authoritative, rigid, or serious is subverted, loosened and mocked."⁴⁰

By including the voice from a civilian who is provoked by these loosened and subversive people, Thompson touches upon a problem concerning the potential in untangling society's social restrictions for the benefit of individual freedom, and that is the deep-rooted fear of otherness implemented in social man and woman by greater society. Much of the stigma against counter-culture protesters came from this attitude, in which hard-working people felt disdained by the new and free movement in the 1960s. David Farber argues in his retrospection on the sixties that the perceived contempt for the hard-working mentality of many Americans were influential in the reception of radical ideology:

"They [the protesters] often revealed contempt for working people and showed much ignorance about those people who still wondered if it was not what was said that counted but what you did.[...] Instead, the protesters' verbosity allowed them to be set up by savvy politicians as scapegoats for any and all problems that encroached on Americans' tenuous hold on a satisfactory life."⁴¹

³⁹Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p273

⁴⁰ Nikita Brottman, *High Theory, low culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. p2

⁴¹David Farber. The Silent Majority and Talk about Revolution, in *The Sixties- From Memory to History*. Ed.

Having this perspective of many people in mind, adds to the social complexity in American society at the time, and Thompson is arguably here showing the contempt for narrow-mindedness. Considering his project, this example also emphasizes how sensationalisation and demonization of considered deviant behaviour puts a stop to any communication across viewpoints. However, the passage also lets the actual reality of different viewpoints come across, and emphasizes that these viewpoints are real and should be taken into consideration, but perhaps more as an example of how the controlling society is upheld by most people. This episode shows how Thompson's storytelling captures the spirit of the times as he experienced it with all its social flaws, inconsistencies, and peoples' inability to agree on the right set of values to live by.

The polyglossia in this example is textual and not actual, which is how the fictional character of reporting experience can engage such intersubjectivity. Thompson manages to juxtapose two different points of view, but there is more confrontation than there is dialogue. However, by revealing tensions and letting them into the discussion, he lays the foundation for a possible site of discussion.

As these conflicting voices are included straightforwardly, as in pure transcription, the polyglossia has one major effect, and that is what James S. Stull suggests, that letting others speak for themselves;

'constructs a more democratic mode of discourse by focusing on the lives of average (common) people and playing down [his] journalistic authority while minimizing the role that public spokespersons- politicians and government officials, for example- often play in shaping journalistic content.[...] locates cultural interpretation in reciprocal contexts and implicitly underscores that reality is a product- and process- negotiated between multiple subjects.'⁴²

This quote resonates with how Thompson goes forth to both represent cultural diversity within one culture, and simultaneously gives examples that show the need for a recontextualisation of collective sentiments in a society that maintains power by excluding certain ways of life as meaningful, while encouraging passive contentment on the whole. While Thompson is expressing unease with the strict categorizations of people, he also celebrates the vast differences in people, showing that within American culture there are all varieties of people, and by giving them a voice he opposes the unilateral presentations of accepted forms of behaviour, for they are not telling the truth of what American society really consisted of in the 1960s. But the power of representation is exemplified in the example of the

David Farber. Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994. p309
42 James S.Stull. *Literary Selves- Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction*. Westport, Connecticut, London:Greenwood Press, 1993. p40

farmer from the book, showing that simple deductions of people's rationale does lead to suspicions and imposed alienation on behalf of greater society via the people who give their trust to sources of information.

Using polyglossia as a means to initiate a renewed discourse on social values and personal freedom sometimes has to involve conflicting ideas, and in this sense Thompson does not simply write about an alienated group and why he believes they ought to be taken for real. He uses textual, generic and literal voices to engage in the discussion. For this reason his contribution to the problem of representation and reception of individuality in practice is reasonable and made with some understanding of the concept of discourse, however entertaining the issue might be. Nikita Brottman again refers to Bakhtin's theory of polyglossia:

'... discourse can never be simple and holistic, but must be split into a series of interacting metalanguages, sometimes conflicting sometimes at play. This interaction between a series of fundamental discourses recurs, claims Bakhtin, at every level of conversation, within whatever context the utterance is made.'⁴³

The examples given and the ones to come are all dealing with the interaction of different contexts, and Thompson's social discourse touches upon different issues that encompass the various interests that exist in society in terms of class, economy, authority, beliefs and convictions. What Thompson's ulterior motive is, is deducable from the devices that he uses. The different discussions that he presents in the book all stem from a misunderstanding that power is somewhere else than in the hands of the civilian, and that control is only attained where only similar groups seek together and believe in the same things and pose no questions to the authorities. That is why polyglossia functions as a part of a democratic process where discourses of social values and inhibitions are shown rather than discussed among appointed savants of society. These examples demonstrate rather than argue for a more active engagement in the assessment of circumstances, and to put things in a more realistic context.

Thompson includes in the book a letter that he received from a Mrs. Whitright, who wrote to him and explained what happened in the town Willits during the 4th of July celebration in 1964. She writes that some of her acquaintances were roughly treated by the Angels, and she writes in the final passage; 'there wasn't too much damage done, but an air of uneasiness hung over town, no one knew what would happen next, and no one could really relax and have fun or enjoy themselves as they usually do on these celebrations on the 4th of

43 Nikita Brottman. *High Theory, low culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. p1

July.⁴⁴

The letter is included in the book next to an official report that according to Thompson added much more flavour to the official version of the 4th of July episode, from which letter this was reported:

'Periodic fighting between the motorcyclists and local citizens broke out with beer bottles, belts made from motorcycle drive chains, and metal beer can openers being used as weapons. It was noted that some members apparently designated as sergeants at arms did not drink, but spent their time watching the group.'⁴⁵

Thompson criticises what in this episode is used by the authorities to emphasize the Angels presence as a deviant group, and their supposed bestiality is used to confirm their place outside the civilised society. This example of diverging representations problematizes the scene of discourse, if what ordinary people interpret deviates from what appointed people interpret out of a situation. There is thus an argument between points of view, between languages, that is revealed by Thompson's new journalistic fiction. This episode shows how Thompson comments on language, as I here assess as representational rhetoric; 're-evaluated and reinterpreted against the backdrop of these languages, and congeals to the point where it becomes a ridiculous image, the comic carnival mask of a narrow and joyless pedant, an unctious hypocritical old bigot, a stingy and dried-up miser.'⁴⁶

From the social example that the motorcycle gang is proven to be, Thompson manages to pose the question: What is life really about? This question is relevant to the whole when one sees that it can be by random acts and rhetoric that one gets placed within the social spectrum of acceptable behaviour and the question can also serve as an incentive to check out for oneself what the actual reality behind representation and stigmatization is. Thompson provides a social critique with his use of polyglossia to represent the actual circumstances, even though he probably chose his sources carefully. By ridiculing how official sources emphasize the Angel's otherness when civilians where it happened were less sensationalist in their descriptions says something of the systematic categorization of others by official discourse.

In popular culture, the play with images that are sacred in others is used to provoke and to create new meanings out of old concepts. It is one way of challenging the old hierarchies and paving the way for something new and rebellious. This aspect of polyglossia

44 Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London:Penguin Essentials, 2011. pp36, 37

45 Ibid. p37

46 M.M.Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination- Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p77

that Thompson makes frequent use of is best exemplified in the following example:

'For many are called, but few are chosen.- St. Matthew. " Since the revelation of the Lynch Report the Angels have rejected so many membership bids that one of them said it was 'like a plague of locusts'. The majority of would-be Angels are independents who suddenly feel the need for fellowship and status...' ⁴⁷

In this passage, Thompson uses biblical imagery to explain ironically the Angels' hype at the time, which is a provoking simile to make. On the one hand there is the pious quality of the Bible, and on the other hand there are the hedonistic and socially antagonistic characteristics of the members of the motorcycle gang. This simile is not pastiche, and is an example of pure irony in a dialogue between utterly different social groups with opposite values. The reference to the Bible aligned with the popularity of the Angels additionally serves as an ironic side-glance to the self-righteousness and peacefulness of religious people who would distance themselves from such self-indulging brutes. In this passage they are brought together in dialogue on print, with no real consequences, but creating a fascinating connection between different groups of people who seek meaning in social collectivity. They are doing the same, but their reasons come from completely different sources. The simile connects well with the idea of the carnival as socially explosive to established social patterns:

'At other times, this carnivalesque impulse takes the form of a mockery of 'intellectual' prose and criticism. In such cases, the language of the writer strives to overcome literariness and to get away from outmoded styles and period-bound language by fusing this very literariness street talk, creating a dialogue between the canonical literary system and the generic languages of various subcultures, making language parody itself. Indeed, the key to much pop culture today lies in the aesthetic[...] avowal of superficiality, of vacancy, of *as little meaning as possible*.' ⁴⁸

Interestingly, it could also be the Angels that Thompson mocks by connecting their actions with pious values; it is not certain. Whichever way one reads Thompson's texts, he seems to deliberately play with concepts and ideas that normally are left safe within their social frames and contextual relevance. Thompson suggests here that strategies in high and low cultures are very much the same and neither can rely on the righteousness of their cause, or so he creates the notion of. Thompson pulls different worlds into an adjacent position, letting them work on each other, and finally showing that no images or concepts are left best sanctified, but should be played with and rejoiced and relieved from the threat of being denied the good will of the surroundings. This is what polyglossia does in *Hell's Angels*, it removes ephemeral distance and makes every utterance and communication vivid and direct and

⁴⁷Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p88

⁴⁸Nikita Brottman. *High Theory, low culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. pp11,12

promotes progression and agreement on the actuality of the circumstances in this textual docudrama.

2.2 Satire counteracting flawed representation.

Hell's Angels was written by Thompson with the main purpose of criticising oversimplifications and sensationalist judgements of affairs of the motorcycle group as they were presented in the Lynch Report. In this book, Thompson makes use of satire to comment on the flawed and unprofessional documentation of the gang that remained a primary source for the law enforcement and the media to be able to deal with the menace. The satirical eye to the following approach to the Angels is filled with the ridicule of unprofessional policemen and their eagerness to blame criminal activity on the Angels even if they are just nearby in a ten mile radius, their eagerness to present them as purely malignant and born to despise normal people, and their subsequent categorization as a pure menace. All these ideas become accepted as truth without actually questioning the bigger picture and the truth behind it. Thompson the satirist runs no errands for the Angels, he acknowledges their brutal behaviour as a social problem, but he suggests that the solution does not lie in the misrepresentation of them by the media. Thus satire functions in *Hell's Angels* to raise awareness of the social outcomes following simple rejection and ill-informed representations of subcultural activity. Satire as a positive force helps society to rethink how the community as a whole deals with social issues, whereas satire as a negative force only reiterates negative stereotypes, maintains simple conspiratorial attitudes towards others and confirms social lies that divide groups and promotes alienation. Thompson shows that the treatment of the Angels as a social problem only maintains the social divisions and suspicions towards others, whereas he attempts to set things straight and change the discussion into a progressive one based on true facts. Furthermore, the extent to which the book can provide actual social critique lies in the suspicion raised that civilized society's approach to deviant behaviour affects all aspects of society, being incomplete and dogmatic.

Robert Elliott assesses the satirist's threat to greater society by suggesting that while the satirist is attacking perversions of institutions, and not the institution itself, the critique of the perversion holds the possibility of 'an attack on a local phenomenon [that] is capable of indefinite extension into an attack of the whole structure of which that phenomenon takes

part.[...]- the part does not merely represent the whole, it *is* the whole.⁴⁹

The institutional perversion that Thompson satirizes in this book is the media and its argued aim to go along with the authority's interests to uphold false information regarding subcultural groups. Approaching the text with an eye to the carnivalesque tradition allows me to read Thompson's text as an interpretation of modern society where he questions the relevance of social boundaries that with closer inspection unveils the boundaries' constructed quality. By making his case through empirical examples his work can arguably encourage the recontextualisation of an individual's social space for determining the self freely, and to be received accordingly without fear and stigmatization.

Thompson also satirizes the members of the motorcycle gang, by making some of their characteristics into a parody of self-conceit, arguably on the same scale as the myth that is thrown at them by society. The at times humorous satire makes the text, that is on the whole a real attempt to provide accurate representations of a group, into a book that could be called 'the divine comedy of the American carnival'. I will provide four examples in the book that establishes *Hell's Angels* as a new journalistic satire and part absurd play.

Thompson presents in his narrative a peculiar aspect with the denouncement of the outlaw group concerning the tendency to overlook the social influence that led the motorcyclists to an outsider's way of life. Thompson places the Angels in a historical context by acknowledging who chose to lead their lives on a motorcycle:

'...there were thousands of veterans in 1945 who flatly rejected the idea of going back to their pre-war pattern. They didn't want order, but privacy- and time to figure things out. It was a nervous downhill feeling, a mean kind of **Angst** that always come out of wars...a compressed sense of time on the outer limits of fatalism. They wanted more action, and one of the ways to look for it was on a big motorcycle.'⁵⁰

By giving a historical explanation that partly elucidates someone's choice to go in exile, Thompson hints at something wrong with the entire concept of war and society. The human vulnerability that is described in this passage is showing how some aspects of human experience are just the result of other experiences rather than void of context. The following denunciation of the group as nothing but a hazard falls short on its own logic, when Thompson contextualises the war as the ex-GIs impetus to want to leave conventional society. With this realisation there follows an understanding that it is futile to judge people's actions based solely on the surface. However, Thompson further states that this impetus to form an

49 Robert C. Elliott. ' *The Satirist and Society*.', ELH, Vol.21, No. 3 (Sept.,1954), pp 237-248. Web. Accessed February 18, 2014 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871965> . p247

50 Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p 68

alternative brotherhood was less an aspect in the continuation of the following biker generations. But the feeling of alienation and lack of belonging in conventional society prevailed, and the satirical comment on lack of recognition of this historical impetus manages to bring down personal enterprise to a level of wanting to obtain freedom and belonging to a cause where you feel like you matter and have a say in what comes next.

Thompson's approach to the handling of the *Hell's Angels* hype is satirical in his way of expressing incredulity of how misrepresentations by appointed intellectuals of society gains foothold in people's minds, and by drawing the historical background to their presence, he manages to point the critique towards society that nurtured these 'soon to be alienated individuals' to begin with. If this aspect had been taken into account, perhaps conventional society's reception of the dealings of the Hell's Angels would be more willing to reflect on the way society works on the individuals belonging under its socio-geographical context. The question arises, who is being uncivilized? This is what the satirical element does to the text in this story.

Phyllis Frus confirms this aspect by pointing out the social influences stemming from such satire in new nonfiction: 'These new forms share a similar belief in the 'unreality' or absurdity of contemporary history.[...] If the New Nonfiction is in any way a response to an altered reality, it is likely to be the unreality of the way we divide up discourse.'⁵¹

Dividing up discourse and relocating it to a social sphere that is relevant, according to Thompson, is hinted at by using these examples to shed light on this particular social issue in the 1960s. Thompson uses satire to explore the consequences of dehumanization of subcultures. The gap between people is man made, and that is potentially the effect of sensationalising behaviours and attitudes that stand out. The next passage I will use to show the satirical content of this book is a comment on the enormous amount of attention on every move the Angels made:

'It was the first time in years that the outlaws had been faced with even the semblance of civic hospitality- and it turned out to be the last, for when the sun came up on that bright Pacific Saturday the infamous Monterey Rape was less than twenty-four hours away from making nationwide headlines. The Hell's Angels would soon be known and feared throughout the land. Their blood, booze and semen flecked image would be familiar to readers of *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Nation*, *Time*, *True*, *Esquire* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Within six months small towns from coast to coast would be arming themselves at the slightest rumour of a Hell's Angels invasion. All three major television networks would be seeking them out with cameras and they would be denounced in the U.S. Senate by

⁵¹Phyllis Frus. *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative – The Timely and the Timeless*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. p126

George Murphy, the former tap dancer.⁵²

This passage serves to picture the circus created around the affairs of the Angels; the argued disproportionate attention, the relentless renunciation, the drawn image of chaotic carnage following in the wake of the Angels from their every move. And then there is this small almost irrelevant phrase at the very end, concerning the former profession of senator Murphy. Being a former tap dancer carries no relevance to what is set in motion, but the short phrase brings about a touch of irony and a sense of coincidence to the state of play. What this ironic and satirical textual side-glance does to the text is to lessen the absolute serious authority of not only the senator, but also the entire structure of power that is relying on absolute solemnity while exercising power, who have been appointed democratically, but which further creates an atmosphere of carnival and political randomness disguised as unsoiled and untouchable righteous dignity. It is not presented as diminutive of someone's right to contribute to social discourse, but I rather assess it to be a small celebrational comment on American society, which entails all forms of professions and expressions, and where everybody can be somebody. However, the satirical critique lies in the notion of corrupting power that places people in authority to perform a role that is not necessarily in vogue with human nature. In this respect, the Angels can be seen as antithetic to a social desire for recognition based on unsoiled performance. This is not to say that the government should rather have stood silent to threats to social stability, but the comments express a satirical glance at the manner in which official conveyors of information rather encouraged exaggerated fear of men on bikes than otherwise. By attacking the social institution's handling of anti-social behaviour, Thompson manages to suggest that these two seemingly different social performers in the American community are not so very different from one another, except in the way they create their image in the social hierarchy. Both social extremes are anchored in the same reality.

Finally, with respect to the former passage, I will include the assessment of practising carnival on behalf of the well-off in society by Stallybrass and White:

'...the disowning of carnival and its symbolic resources, a gradual reconstruction of the idea of carnival as the culture of the 'other'. This act of disavowal on the part of the emergent bourgeoisie, with its sentimentalism and its disgust, *made* carnival into the festival of the Other. It encoded all that which the proper bourgeois must strive *not to be* in order to preserve a stable and 'correct' sense of self.'⁵³

This very aspect seems to be the symptom of Thompson's satirical glance at the

52 Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p 14

53 Peter Stallybrass, White, Allon. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methue & Co. Ltd, 1986. p178

sensationalist creation of the Hell's Angel's hype in American society. The following passage deals with an episode in which the Angels were, in Thompson's words, conveniently accused of stabbing a marine in the neck:

'Several hours after the crime the four had been arrested-'quite by coincidence', said the *News*- at the same hospital where the victim Marine was being treated. They just wandered in,' jacketed, booted and wearing telltale gold earrings...to see about having a cyst removed from the neck of one of them.' This immediately established a motive and a prime suspect- the man with the cyst. It was pressing on the tail of his medulla, causing great pain. After enduring it as long as possible he lost control of himself and stabbed a passing Marine. Then the whole pack ran aimlessly through the Village for several hours, like a family of hyenas, until they found themselves in front of a hospital, which they decided to enter and have done with the fiendish cyst that had caused all the trouble in the first place.'⁵⁴

This episode recounted by Thompson ridicules a tendency by official authorities to blame anyone looking suspiciously out of the ordinary for any potential crimes committed when the Angels are around. The sarcastic remarks on the rationale behind the solving of the crime make ridiculous the tendency to find the nearest outcast that would be most probable as someone who would do such an anti-social act. Thompson expresses his view on the demonisation of the Angels by exaggerating the significance of irrelevant factors that could be true per se, but that does not hold any relevance as to solving the crime. Thompson establishes with his sarcasm that a few men with the biker jackets were roaming about in the city and because of the pain of having an inflamed cyst people like that would be capable of harming others that came in their way. Thompson exaggerates how the police came to the conclusion of who was guilty, and uses an imagined scenario where the individuals in question were supposed to behave like roaming animals attacking anyone nearby. The reader cannot avoid thinking after reading this passage: is this the line of thought used by the peace keeping authorities in all cases to uncover criminal activity, and is an accusation not supposed to be based on hard-core facts and not based on will-full deductions? This openly biased presentation of a group of people is mixed with an understanding that they *could* actually perform criminal acts, which make the reader become uncertain of what is really happening, and finally I am left with a feeling after this ridiculing of certain aspects of society that no one is really having the upper hand on issues. The aggressive attitude towards flawed understanding of events and the pretence of knowing what one does, serves to question how society divides up discourse, in Frus' line of thought. Thompson communicates a sense of bewilderment combined with indignation with his confrontational attitude, while the solution

⁵⁴Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p256

to this misrepresentation remains elusive. When Thompson writes about real offences in the light of fiction, and making us read it as fiction, we are able to see the issue as a whole rather than interpreting the particular as a whole in itself. At this junction Thompson creates with the satirical approach in the text a means to unveil systematic stigmatization on behalf of the Angels by the authorities.

The fourth example that highlights satire, is found where Thompson refers to the Lynch Report, where the investigators spent time considering if the motorcycle members had homosexual tendencies:

'Certainly the Lynch report is not the last word on the Angels, but the nature and bias of the document is such that any available evidence of their homosexual action would have been prominently mentioned. The report makes so many references to cunnilingus that the word *fellatio* is conspicuous by its absence. No doubt there are Freudian ramifications even in this omission- but again, I think they are mainly beside the point. Any attempt to explain the Hell's Angels as an essentially homosexual phenomenon would be a cop-out, a self-satisfied dismissal of a reality that is as complex and potentially malignant as anything in American society.'⁵⁵

In this passage the attention to any deviant characteristics is presented by Thompson to form a main attitude in the Lynch Report. It becomes funny in that the indignation expressed by Thompson is spiced with incredulity of the search for any characteristics that are opposed to the conventional at the time. It is funny for a modern reader that Thompson addresses this, for there could certainly be more actual social flaws to be pinned down on the Angels?

Thompson thus performs political satire that questions the legitimacy of acknowledged conveyors of information, but this particular example creates a suspicion that the problem of representation and stigmatization has its roots in the way society defines accepted and acknowledgeable behaviour. Geoffrey Baym and Jeffrey Jones inquiry into the more horatian satire in the *The Daily Show* with John Stewart, recognize that;

'news parody not only exposes the machinery of the news but in more piercing forms also can confront the broader machinery of public discourse. We find several examples of parody interrogating the efforts by those in positions of power to shape popular understanding of the political sphere.'⁵⁶

In *Hell's Angels* this realisation is more shocking than all the petty crimes and chauvinistic attitudes upheld by the Angel's internal social law. Even while the Angels are presented as provokingly self-indulgent and less educated, the almost arranged hostility by greater society is further away from acceptable social truth and reality.

⁵⁵ Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p100

⁵⁶ *News Parody and Political Satire Across the Globe*. Eds. Geoffrey Baym, Jones, Jeffrey P. London, New York: Routledge, 2013. p4

2.3 Grotesque enactments of social disturbance.

The grotesque as a narrative device functions to shock people into reacting upon what is described. Grotesque imagery does not have to include deformity or extra-normality. Whereas the descriptions of the activities and mentality of the *Hell's Angels* by no means can be categorized as sick or beyond social recognition, Thompson rather depicts how their social enactment can actually be recognised as derivative of conventional society, and this realisation can create a sense of unease. In Kathryn Hume's tripartite system of normality and abnormality, and the space between, the grotesque is that which is ready to emerge. I will provide four examples of the grotesque and discuss how the grotesque affects the text. The first example deals with the rumoured rite of passage for new entries:

'Every Angel recruit comes to his initiation wearing a new pair of Levis and a matching jacket with the sleeves cut off and a spotless emblem on the back. The ceremony varies from one chapter to another but the main feature is always the defiling of the initiate's new uniform. A bucket of dung and urine will be collected during the meeting, then poured on the newcomer's head in a solemn baptismal. Or he will take off his clothes and stand naked while the bucket of slop is poured over them and the others stomp in it. These are his 'originals', to be worn every day until they rot.'⁵⁷

Whether the initiation rite is grounded in reality is of questionable value, but the description of such an irrational mode of behaviour encourages reflection on why, and to what ends? Given that this is not pure fiction but grounded in perceived reality the unease or discomfort caused by this knowledge is ontological. The fictional description of reality amplifies the actuality of it. The initiation rite is not invented by imagination, so it carries the possibility to actual discussion on the meaning and truth value of such a specific enactment of deviant behaviour. There are several institutions that encourage and acknowledge initiation rites as part of a play with social power and engagement. Examples from reality can be found in student unions, American sororities and fraternities, the Norwegian 'russ' celebrations, Christmas work parties and so on. Only, writing about the Angels' more serious and actual rites of passage is dealing with an actual refusal of civilised norms, and not a playful enactment of it before going conventional. The carnivalesque element in the description of the rite is unavoidable, and where Thompson includes this aspect of the lives of motorcycle group members, he encourages us to reflect upon why this defiling of human purity is so provocative by conventional standards and intriguing and progressive by deviant standards. Kathryn Hume argues on the grotesque and the formless:

'Among those useful to me were his [Harpham] formulation of the grotesque as an excess of energy

⁵⁷ Thompson . *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p54

without containing form, the irruption of the unconscious into the conscious, the irruption of the archaic or mythological into the historical, and the distortion of the ideal type,...[...]The grotesque arises in the specifically metamorphic, or form-changing, activities that can be recognized as a threat only by the humans who rely on scientific taxonomy; in other words, the formless alters humanity's forms or intrudes upon the system.⁵⁸

Thompson plays with the idea of what constitutes an ideal individual in a group. While being soaked in dung and urine does not appeal to many conventional citizens, it is presented in this story to make sense for the motorcycle members. The scientific taxonomy is applied to a fixed sense of stable order in nature, or in the created hypernatural world. The description of the initiation rite hints at a few possible social intentions. One is the idea that if one wants to be fully immersed in an outlaw group one must demonstrate a willingness to go all the way in terms of engagement. Another idea is to be fully prepared to stand out as an outlaw in all environments, and to be proud of being easy with human excrements. But what does it say about what Thompson chooses to write about? Choosing to write about the Angels invites to a close consideration of grotesque elements in society in the first place, so it remains a reflection on the fascinating varieties of human expression, and how groups of people and authors in their own way try to come to terms with cultural and legal inhibitions. The law itself is also a cultural construct, and the orientation towards cleanliness in a civilised society speaks of a deliberate distancing from the biological body versus the higher and civilised human being. While Thompson includes the supposed initiation rite to affect the story, and the Angels supposedly perform the rite to celebrate liberation from conventional society, the carnivalesque character in the embodiment of the grotesque carries an abstract and philosophical value. Ted Hiebert acknowledges the conscious act to remove oneself from established social roles as the social enactment of 'Becoming Animal':

'A becoming that is not precisely a becoming something different, but rather an ambivalent becoming of sorts. A liberation from a *specific* role that necessarily entails the embracing, not of a *different* role, but of the *space between roles*. And as the carnival is resistant to the static and complete, so too a becoming self works in the spaces between completion: 'the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between to multiplicities' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:249). And the becoming-animal is of special importance here simply because of the recontextualization of the carnival as a self-reflexive performance. A subversion of the roles embraced in day-to-day life. And a contemporary becoming that struggles against the self, subverting the constraints of the human by becoming animal.'⁵⁹

58 Kathryn Hume. *Aggressive fictions- Reading the Contemporary American Novel*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2012. pp80,81

59 Ted Hiebert. 'Becoming *Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity*', *Performance Research*, 8(3), pp 113-125, © Taylor & Francis Ltd 2003. Web. Accessed March 4,2014.

The liberating aspect of becoming something different than expected by a nurturing mother culture is dealt with in this passage, and in the empirical example from an activity based in reality. The example is in addition remarked upon with an ironic side-glance, for it also fits with the idea of demonisation on account of external spectators. To include the rite of passage in the story emphasizes the ambivalence of right and wrong, of truth and myth, and the ambivalence of the actual relevance to the understanding of alternative expressions and enactments of meaning and coherence.

Thompson gives heed to the Angel's dress- up as an expression of debunking conventional standards of behaviour:

" People are already down on us because we're Hell's Angels,' Zorro explained.' This is why we like to blow their minds. It just more or less burns'em, that's all. They hate anything that's not right for their way of living.' Anybody who has ever seen the Angels on a run will agree that rural Californians are likely to reject the spectacle as not right for their way of living. It is human zoo on wheels. An outlaw whose normal, day-to-day appearance is enough to disrupt traffic will appear on a run with his beard dyed green or bright red, his eyes hidden behind orange goggles, and a brass ring in his nose. Others wear capes and Apache headbands, or oversize sunglasses and peaked Prussian helmets. Earrings, *Wehrmacht* headgear and German Iron Crosses are virtually part of the uniform- like the grease-caked Levis, the sleeveless vests and all those fine tattoos: 'Mother', 'Dolly', 'Hitler', 'Jack the Ripper', swastikas, daggers, skulls, 'LSD', 'Love', 'Rape' and the inevitable Hell's Angels insignia.⁶⁰

Describing their outfit and the subsequent reactions to their presence works in the storytelling to convey how deviant behaviour and rhetoric is at times received as a threat to the order of things. What Thompson conveys by shedding light on this aspect is how fragile the stable order of things then is, and how bound the signifiers are to good or bad concepts. To tattoo the swastika on one's arm signifies a glorification of an otherwise traumatic part of history, no doubt, and therefore a negative reception is expected. However, according to the carnivalesque tradition, playing with concepts and reappropriating them for alternative uses can also serve to remove the ownership of signs and symbols, and to reforge a new and contemporary view on society and history. There is no respectful distance to any issues that might be personal to some, but rather a direct and spoofing approach to what has been considered sacred and untouchable by most. Edwards and Graulund's explanation of excess elaborates what happens when using the grotesque as a narrative device:

'For it is an assault upon the idea of a rational world; it is an assault upon the reader himself, upon his sensibilities.(McElroy:27) It is then, in the relentless excess of [Thompson's] grotesques that the excessive can

<http://www.tedhiebert.net/site/downloads/writings/carnival.pdf> p115
60 Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. pp133, 134

be both destructive and revelatory because it exposes the boundary.'⁶¹

What is striking then about Thompson's narrative is that he relates directly with a contemporary American reality, and this realisation amplifies the reception of a text that deals with themes that normally exposes the boundaries in rational imaginary thought.

A third example of the exaggerations within the grotesque in Thompson's narrative on the Hell's Angels is found in their anti-feminist treatment of girls who choose to ride along with the Angels, called 'mamas':

'One night in Sacramento the Angels ran out of beer money and decided to auction off Mama Lorraine in a bar. The top bid was twelve cents, and the girl laughed along with the others. [and] The Gypsy Jokers are not as mama-oriented as the Angels, but the Satan's Slaves are so keen on the practice that they take their communal women down to the tattoo parlour and have 'Property of Satan's Slaves' etched permanently on the left rump-cheek. The slaves feel that branding gives the girl a sense of security and belonging. It erases any doubt about peer-group acceptance. The branded individual is said to experience powerful and instantaneous sensations of commitment, of oneness with the organization, and those few who have taken the step form a special elite.'⁶²

Thompson's retraction of the role of women in the Hell's Angels universe is anti-social at best. In this case, the grotesque eye to the diminishing of one's own self-worth resonates with the nihilistic view on the self that the carnivalesque performance can be an expression of. The example given here is the darker side of the contesting of boundaries, and Ted Hiebert suggests the following:

'Rather, the self is possessed by the world that qualifies it.[...] And the enactment of possession in the carnival, then, is a reversal of roles between the self and the social forces that possess it. Not independent of possession, however, for though altered, the relationship persists. And it is not an exorcism that occurs with the carnival enacting of possession. Rather, a recontextualisation of the relationship one already has with social forces and normalized behaviours. One in which one is no longer a victim of social conditioning but in which one performs (in) it. A possessed play, and a playing with possession.'⁶³

There can thus be a sensed liberation in performing as the possessed, and the staged enactment of it. Whereas the entire idea of owning and selling people creates a distinct feeling of unease, it is here enacted by all the parts involved by consent. The grotesque enactment of social relationship thus serves as a reminder of the futility in avoiding social norms, but also as a liberating theatrical staging of it, and sadly- creating a nagging thought that the idea of,

61 Justin D. Edwards, Graulund. Rune. *Grotesque- the New Critical Idiom*. Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2013.p75

62 Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. pp199,200

63 Ted Hiebert. 'Becoming Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity', *Performance Research*, 8(3), pp 113-125, © Taylor & Francis Ltd 2003. Web. Accessed March 4,2014.
<http://www.tedhiebert.net/site/downloads/writings/carnival.pdf> p119

human in this case, possession is a factor in social life to begin with.

Violence is a factor that Thompson deals with in his narrative depiction of the motorcycle-gang environment. The rumoured violent and erratic behaviour is explained by Thompson to fill the air around, in such a manner that their hostility fills any room in which they are present. Although it is a satiric twist to indulge their violent behaviour in the text, given that their violent tendencies were used for sensationalist demonization, it carries grotesque connotations that the Angels demonstrate such a primitive and beastly behaviour. Such an uncontrolled characteristic of a person speaks of an exaggerated aggression, that is either invented or actual, that makes them incomparable to civilised people. Following Kathryn Hume's idea of the grotesque between normal and utterly unthinkable, excessive violence is reminiscent of primitive man and woman's tendency to violence to protect their territory, only subdued by the age of civilisation and brought to erupt only in periods of unrest, such as social decline, war and times where a force majeure has made its impact. Therefore any violent acts are not entirely unthinkable to civilians, but the idea of violence being the norm is scary and strangely close to primitive conditions where the survival of the fittest is the norm. Thompson tells the tale of Smackey Jack, legendary president of the Slaves:

'Man, that Jack was outta sight. Sometimes he'd run wild for three or four days on pills and wine. He carried a pair of rusty pliers around with him and we'd sic him on strange roads. Man, he'd jerk'em down on the ground and start pullin' their teeth out with those goddamn pliers. I was with him in a place one time when the waitress wouldn't give us any coffee. Jack climbed right over the counter and took out three of her front teeth with his pliers. Some of the things he did would turn your stomach. Once he pulled out one of his own teeth in a bar. People couldn't believe it. A lot of'em ran out when they saw he was serious. When he finally got the thing out, he laid it down on the bar and asked if he could trade it for a drink. He was spittin' blood on the floor, but the bartender was too shook up to say anything.'⁶⁴

Kathryn Hume addresses the unease created by such references to bestial behaviour: 'Thus we might pit the law-and-order side against chaos, and the savage human behaviour that resulted from the disappearance of all law might be grotesque and upsetting to the degree that it could represent a universal possibility.'⁶⁵

In other words, the moral codes of the motorcycle gang are so deviant, but non the less brought to bear upon conventional society in temporary clashes, that they serve as a reminder of how things could be were there no law to pacify exaggerated aspects of human nature.

64 Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p202

65 Kathryn Hume. *Aggressive fictions- Reading the Contemporary American Novel*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2012. p81

How does Thompson use the grotesque to suggest a more open and less inhibiting society? Several ideas spring to mind, and one of them is that the totality of the book is an attempt to come to terms with the made up image of the Angels, and Thompson goes far in establishing that much of their anti-social behaviour stemmed from strong encouragement from the media and from conventional society's judgement of them, pushing already alienated people to a point where there is no use in trying to maintain a proper façade in the face of civilised society, for the damage had already been done. Second, one can imagine that in a civilisation with strict rules and conventional boundaries, someone is bound to oppose these, and the stricter the definitions of decency are, the more indecent the opposite can be, in correlation with the already established rules of conduct. The grotesque is, although arguably in a neither nor position – for it is stemming from natural human interaction, a reminder of what is acceptable within boundaries. The grotesque is distorting what is normal into an exaggerated, excessive and extravagant version of what already is. In which case the total condemnation of it is misplaced and should rather encourage further reflection of what constitutes normality and decency. Violence, such as in the former example, thus ridicules to a certain extent the frustration one feels when matters are not on one's side, and gives the reader a glimpse into the frustrated psyche of an individual who already has been pushed to the limits and is out of reasonable control, and the more serious damage he or she can inflict on people. Thompson redraws the connection between all constituents in a society, and shows the reader that society is an organism in which all play their part, and therefore he argues by using the grotesque, satire and polyglossia, that the cooperation between all these constituents could do with a reminder of this, and to refashion ideas of normalcy.

I will finish off this chapter with a quote from the book by Hunter S. Thompson that sums up the intention with the carnivalesque treatment of Hell's Angels:

'To see the Hell's Angels as caretakers of the old 'individualist' tradition 'that made this country great' is only a painless way to get around seeing them for what they really are- not some romantic leftover, but the first wave of a future that nothing in our history has prepared us to cope with. The Angels are prototypes. Their lack of education has not only rendered them completely useless in a highly technical economy, but it has also given them the leisure to cultivate a powerful resentment...and to translate it into a destructive cult which the mass media insist on portraying as a sort of isolated oddity, a temporary phenomenon that will shortly become extinct now that it's been called to the attention of the police.'⁶⁶

While Thompson criticises the institutions that uphold the oversimplified myths of individuals and a group that no longer fit the established national identity, he expresses

⁶⁶Thompson. *Hell's Angels*. London: Penguin Essentials, 2011. p304

frustration and indignation on behalf of the development of modern society. His experimentation with realistic representation, merging fact and fiction, enables the discussion of social values to be made on both a philosophical level and a realistic level. The philosophical is amplified by the actual realism, and vice versa. Thematically, the potential shock value in getting up close to an outlaw group, serves to familiarise the conventional citizen with the harsh realities of outsiders, leaving romantic and thriller-like urban legends behind. New Journalism and the Gonzo style provided for Thompson a fresh angle from which to deal with subjects and issues, for it was not grounded in established ways of representation. Therefore, both the narrative technique and the marginal or very local subjects, was written about in a way that paved alternative grounds for literary expression. The style confirmed the subject, being different and alternative in its essence. Thompson's project then, to comment on social restrictions and inhibitions working on the individual and challenging these in order to liberate the self, is therefore made by holistic representation, in which all elements confirm his attitude and inclination.

I set out to demonstrate how Thompson's writing entails a vision of less strict social boundaries, and he does that by reminding the reader of how high moral society performs low moral judgements when exercising authority on deviant subcultures. The satire and ridicule of this tendency speaks of the desire for less social constraints and more genuine and honest assessment of true values. Thompson does not attempt to make what he sees into a subtle observation, he seeks and performs a realistic attitude in the face of unknown social territory. Thompson the satirist criticises the hypocrisy, self-deceits and misinformation that affect peoples' perceptions, by letting voices speak for themselves, counteracting misinformation with facts, reminding the reader that culture is a construct, and that a different and more open understanding of the self and agency is already performed on many social levels in the American carnivalesque; it only needs to be acknowledged.

3 Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas – A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream

'Wonderful luck. By the time the alarm goes off, I can be running full bore somewhere between Needles and Death Valley- jamming the accelerator through the floorboard and shaking my fist up at Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., swooping down on me in his FBI/Screaming Eagle helicopter. -YOU CAN RUN, BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE.- Fuck you, Efrem, that wisdom cuts both ways.'⁶⁷

This short glimpse into the frenzy of the novel is representative for the overall tone and attitude throughout the book. *Fear and Loathing* turned out to be a great success at the time of its publication, and the book was turned into a motion picture in 1998, with a mixed reception as to it having any significance to literary art. As far as if the movie managed to convey the same atmosphere as the book, of which the reviewers do not agree, the following comment shows how the story failed to muster any reflections on 'why' and 'what for': 'One long offensive treatise on how vile two human beings can be.' - Barbara Shulgasser, San Francisco Examiner.'⁶⁸

This is an opinion that covers some general sense of the story, and the dismissal of the story's relevance to social discourse is absolute. Other reviews are full of praise for its political incorrectness and the novelty of this type of cultural representation. Such a review that demonstrates surprised acknowledgement was given by Jonathan Raban in the *London Magazine* in 1973: 'No hood or cop could be as unbuttoned, as obscene and sensitive and open, as Hunter, motherfucking his way over the typewriter keys like an attentive secretary to his own subconscious.'⁶⁹

These two receptions both represent how the story goes far in its unapologetic and uninhibited rhetoric, and they both treat the story as entertainment gone bad or gone off conventional tracks. One is appalled and the other is pleurably shocked. The rhetorical context of the time was ripe for publications like *Fear and Loathing*, and the rhetoric Thompson uses was characteristic of that of the political left during the 60s, during which period Thompson was developing his voice. Kenneth Cmiel interprets the use of violent language as grounded in an urge to provoke social sensibilities and-;

'...that polite society had its priorities backward. There was something grotesquely

67 Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. p85

68 Metacritic.com – Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. Universal Pictures. Release Date: May 22, 1998. Web. Accessed April 28, 2014. < <http://www.metacritic.com/movie/fear-and-loathing-in-las-vegas/critic-reviews> >

69 Thompson. 'P.S. Ideas , interviews and features...' in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. p13

misguided about a middle-class decorum that masked the profound inequalities of America[...] Exposing the 'real' obscenities of America led to a wave of shock tactics.⁷⁰

The real obscenities in this book are portrayed through examples of ignorant hatred and suspicion of others, the Vietnam War and its horrors, the excessive mind-numbing entertainment encouraging passiveness, double standards and ignorance by people who have representative authority. The shock tactics were often of an indecent character, so as to repel all notions of moral high grounds, to shock people into reflection and to start them interpreting themselves in their own contexts. I am going to read the seemingly story of nonsense through the lenses of dialogue, satirical intent and the use of the grotesque as narrative devices intended to provoke and remind the reader of the story's representative description of one man's reflections on the American society of the early 1970s. The rhetoric that Thompson uses to convey his experience is brutal and aggressive, with a humoristic side-glance at himself. In this book, Thompson applies his emotional and associative abilities to describe social influences, in order to bring cultural structures down to a personal level, by combining observation to perception in a joint effort. Thompson thus takes control over his experience, as a Gonzo journalist. Stull suggests that Thompson's fears for the future and for his own capacity to deal with a normative culture is the central issue of his literary productions:

'Thompson's trepidation reveals (on a personal level) a dislike of socially defined and densely populated space and simultaneously establishes (on rhetorical and cultural levels) the central conflict of his writing: the deviant (outsider) confronting a brutal and at times punitive mainstream culture.'⁷¹

First I will give a brief overview of the story before I begin a close reading of passages that literally express and prompt the social angst and survival mode that Thompson goes into, in the attempt to accentuate his experience of the felt unreality of the cultural make-up of society. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* begins suddenly by introducing a journalist on the go to cover the Mint 400 in the desert adjacent to Las Vegas. Raoul Duke and Dr. Gonzo, his Samoan attorney friend, are driving in their red Chevy convertible stacked with a variety of drugs. The first part of the book deals with how they fail to cover anything, mostly due to the desert sand that blocks any kind of view. The story frame of the second part is concerned with an extra journalistic task Duke is asked to cover, namely the National District Attorney's conference on Drugs and Narcotics. The scene is thereby set for the purposes of satire and

70 Kenneth Cmiel. 'The Politics of Civility', in *The Sixties- from Memory to History*. Ed. David Farber, Chapel Hill&London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994. p274

71 James N.Stull. *Literary Selves- Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction..* Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1993. p88

parody. The book can be read as an immature appraisal of the fun of drugs and ridiculing authorities, but I argue that by putting Thompson in a narrative context and interpreting him alongside his literary techniques, his work also speaks of deeper issues: social issues in terms of right and wrong, meaningful interaction, sentiments of happiness and predictability, alienation from cultural values and the realisation of the range of inhibiting social codes embedded in all interaction and how this affects the individual. However, these deeper issues are reflected upon using black humour and self-regarding parody, making it into a story about an absurd vision of two men barely managing to perform their task while trying to make it to the end. The fact that Thompson carries the badge of a journalist on the search for realistic coverage, amplifies the absurd black humour that permeates the story. This narrative arranges reality from a different point of view, giving normative society an insight into the minds of those who see things differently. As Stull points out: 'Thompson challenges, for example, the arbitrary nature of conventional journalism forms (stories) and offers a more indeterminate reading of social and personal reality.[...] Thompson's journalism may even be seen as the parodic quest for meaning.'⁷²

Thompson expresses these issues by narrating himself as the recipient of these conflicting emotions, of which symptoms he theatrically enacts. The narrative involves the writer and actor performing as a trickster figure in some situations- a figure that responds to these social contradictions by internalizing the flaws in the social structure and acting them out on others, and in some of the examples as an angst-ridden drug induced observer of absurd enactments of social importance and grandeur. Both these modes of representation together shape the story as a social outburst of trying to put bits and pieces together in a cultural whole. Given that Thompson's character is indulging in self-regarding parody, he does not pretend to be a good example, but his angst and worry of where society is moving, is. Therefore I choose to exemplify his reflections in the order of developments in Thompson's narrative, by jumping to and fro angst-ridden paranoia, unscrupulous behaviour and sombre reflection, continuously, in which he is the main reference holding the inconsistencies in the story together. In *Fear and Loathing*, the use of polyglossia, satire and the grotesque are intermingled, and many of the passages are influenced by all three devices at the same time, affecting the pace and the intense atmosphere throughout the story.

Among those who have interpreted the novel, historian Douglas Brinkley gave the

⁷² James N. Stull. *Literary Selves- Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction*. Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1993. p90

following conclusion: ' Hunter was using Vegas as a metaphor for the American Dream in an arch and many ways scathing denunciation of American culture, yet at the same time it's a celebration of American culture.'⁷³

Going to Vegas to explore where the outer limits of social interaction are enacted every day, as a sanctioned space for social release, is in Thompson a good place to start exploring the essence in post-modern cultural interaction.

Compared to *Hell's Angels*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is written from a different perspective and with a different focalization. The first book was written by Thompson's looking in to a subculture, making observations and drawing connections from external sources and utterances, in other words, the 'field work' was presented from an external point of view, and rhetorically still at ease with conventional standards and speaking with acknowledged social engagement. The Gonzo style that is Thompson's signature, however, necessitates thorough involvement, with Hunter acting as a participant anthropologist, so what is more striking and engaging with *Fear and Loathing* is that it is internally focalised. In other words, *Hell's Angels* was about a group of people of which Thompson deduced their enactments as a social phenomenon, not an aberration. In this book, the story is concerned with the fictional persona of Thompson himself, and the reader follows the inner journey of Duke, on the road to experience the realisation of American values in Las Vegas. Thompson lets go of all social inhibitions early on, goes to extreme lengths to explore social limits, and does not speak on behalf of greater society. He has instead cut himself loose and is acting out on all his impulses and thoughts, though in the narrative it becomes clear that his actions and thought are prompted by the very structures in greater society, to which his narrative serves as a dialogue. In *Hell's Angels*, the subcultural group was being looked at in the rhetoric of greater society, whereas in *Fear and Loathing* it is greater society that Thompson provokes into reassessing its tendencies from an outsider's and deviant's point of view. Given that Thompson the actor/writer has previously acquired recognition from greater society, his release from it is amplified by his earlier works. The use of menippean satire and the grotesque is more obvious in this story, and Thompson's Gonzo style is more evident in *Fear and Loathing* in that it can be read as a crazed outburst of a conflicting stream of consciousness.

73 William McKeen. Outlaw Journalist- The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson. London: Aurum Press, 2009. p169

3.1 Developing a dialogue challenging mechanical representation.

Whereas there are a number of conversations and use of conflicting images and situations in *Fear and Loathing*, much of the polyglot dialogue lies in the underlying references to acceptable behaviour and actions. In *Hell's Angels*, polyglossia was a means to play with the interaction of voices and perspectives, as to ground the book's rationale in the voices of many, to engage in a democratic process to explore the concept of the Angel's way of life. In *Fear and Loathing*, polyglossia is rather a means to explain Duke's departure from conventional deduction of situations, as part of his development towards a disrupter of social order, to seek other ways of experiencing social conditions. This sub-chapter will then build upon the development of Thompson's chosen role as a rebel against stigmatisation and dogma. Stam writes about the referentiality in creating a literary dialogue:

'Dialogism consists not in the mere encounter of two voices, then, but in the fact that every utterance is emitted in anticipation of the discourse of an interlocutor. Bakhtinian dialogism, Dana Polan suggests, can be seen as a 'rewriting' of the Saussurean view of language as the diacritical play of difference, this time recast as the play of difference between the text and all its others: author, intertext, real and imagined addressees, and the communicative context.'⁷⁴

In this context, Thompson's enactment of the trickster figure is performative as both satiric play and dialogue with the surroundings. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* works in terms of dialogue as a story that speaks with its own culture, not by addressing culture directly, but by showing how American society in the early 1970s was experienced by one of its own. The dialogue with the surroundings works in Thompson's text by provoking responses from others, but also the reader, on account of his excessive behaviour. Stull elaborates Thompson's role as a trickster figure in relation to civilised American culture:

'Thompson plays the trickster figure who intentionally- and at times unintentionally- disrupts the social order or shows disdain for certain persons while he underscores his role as deviant or putative outsider. [...] In other words, while Thompson voluntarily offers symbols of his marginality, they may very well represent how the deviant has internalized the culture's perception of how he should dress and behave.'⁷⁵

One example of Thompson's conscious or unconscious enactment of conventional society's expectations of normal behaviour is demonstrated in the very beginning, where Duke and the Attorney pick up a hitch-hiker described as a poor Okie kid, innocent, idealistic and on the search for adventures. It does not take long before the two seasoned adventurers of a

⁷⁴ Robert Stam. *Subversive Pleasures- Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989. p187

⁷⁵ James N. Stull. *Literary Selves- Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction..* Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1993. p96

different kind begin to unravel in front of the kid, as they are affected with mind altering substances:

'How long can we maintain? I wondered. How long before one of us starts raving and jabbering at this boy? What will he think then? This same lonely desert was the last known home of the Manson family. Will he make that grim connection when my attorney starts screaming about bats and huge manta rays coming down on the car? If so- well, we'll just have to cut his head off and bury him somewhere. Because it goes without saying that we can't turn him loose. He'll report us at once to some kind of outback nazi law enforcement agency, and they'll run us down like dogs. Jesus! Did I say that? Or just think it? [...] I glanced over at my attorney, but he seemed oblivious- watching the road, driving our Great Red Shark along at a hundred and ten or so. There was no sound from the back seat.'⁷⁶

In this passage, Thompson speaks of the self that is aware of how it is judged by its surroundings and the realisation that the perception is off track, although willingly. This passage suggests that the two characters are on a trip that is not conveyable to others who take social reality for granted, and this aspect makes the story into an experiment and a play with social restrictions and the alternative possibilities of the performing self. Thompson's inner voice is fearful of the sanctions were it to be discovered the extent of his exaggerated thinking, and discovered it is for he does not manage to contain himself. Which again speaks of an uninhibited approach to the unravelling experiences, for Thompson's mind is about to let go of social consideration. The side glance at the hilarity of such impulses is a factor in this description, making it appear that one understands social codes and one is not posing a threat to peace and order. The role that Duke is performing is not pretentious and pretending to be an example of how to act and relate to the outside world, but rather self-parodical to the point where the main function is to express a sense of paranoia in the face of not recognising one's rational self in society. As Stull writes of this *modus operandi*: 'Thompson thus enacts much of the playful and passive-aggressive posturing that characterised the behaviour of the counterculture, most notably the yippies.[...] Thompson not only plays the trickster but tacitly acknowledges his awareness of the role he is playing.'⁷⁷

Thompson as the trickster figure functions as an out-of-control persona who challenges his surroundings into reflection by turning their own laws, codes and history against them. The boy represents both naïveté and optimism, and Duke and Dr. Gonzo represent a certain disillusionment and experienced cynicism. The two characters are on a journey where the limits of social perception are challenged, and the scene with the Okie kid

⁷⁶ Hunter S. Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. p5

⁷⁷ James N. Stull. *Literary Selves- Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction*. Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1993. p96

represents the departure from the safe and predictable, thereby underscoring Thompson's intention to go all the way, literally and metaphorically. In terms of the American carnivalesque this example draws in comparison the decent coming-age against the ramblings of a psychotic. Nikita Brottman interprets madness in the carnivalesque:

'There is a constant similarity between the polyglossia of the carnival, textual and nontextual, and the manifold layers and levels of discourse within the lunatic's psychological dialogism.[...], which disrupts by juxtaposing public indecency with official order.'⁷⁸

By introducing himself as a drug dilettante imposing on other people's sense and expectancy of normalcy and predictability, Raoul Duke invites the reader into a nonsensical trip of two out-of-control drug induced happy-go-lucky people. The dialogue is black humoristic and absurd, but juxtaposed with the innocent coming-of-age kid, the two come out of the equation as blasé and out of control, thereby establishing Thompson's unrestrained effort to explore social limits.

The second example of dialogue between different ways of approaching an understanding of the world is given in the section where Raoul Duke is co-operating with the photographer Lacerda to cover the Mint Race in the first part of the book. Together they represent the conventional journalist and the joker journalist, and the clash is on. Before the description of Lacerda's work morale, Duke/ Thompson describes the impossibility of covering an event that is impossible to observe and see, literally, because of the amount of sand that is swirling in the air due to the motorcycles:

'Lacerda insisted on Total Coverage. He wanted to go back out in the dust storm and keep trying for some rare combination of film and lens that might penetrate the awful stuff.[...] That poor geek, I thought, as I hurried down the escalator. They sent him out here on this perfectly reasonable assignment just a few photos of motorcycles and dune buggies racing around the desert- and now he was plunged, without realizing it, into the maw of some world beyond his ken. There was no way he could possibly understand what was happening.'⁷⁹

Lacerda plays a part in the narrative as one who does not problematize the representation of lived experience, as one who shows faith in the accountability of his task, contrasting with Duke, who eventually finds no meaning in going about with conventional methods to present his work. In the narrative, the difference between these two symbolises an accentuation of how conventional representation does not suffice in the attempt to fully express social perception, and that the conventional way is rather missing out on social

78 Nikita Brottman. *High theory, low culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2005. p17

79 Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics. 2005. pp40,56

essence. Considering Thompson's critique of flawed representation in *Hell's Angels*, he here comments on his own departure from fixed approaches, and fixed points of perspective, thereby actively promoting a further developed journalistic narrative. The motorcycle narrative responded to, and against, established patterns; Duke responds by narrating new patterns of social representation.

Thompson opposes the conventional approach, as he independently searches for alternative ways to document cultural meaning that will be more in tune with experienced reality. Robert Alexander explains the role of photography in the act of presenting reality:

'But if photography offered journalism the comforting vision of a world of independently existing truths readily available to the reporter's professional eye and pen, that reassurance came at a profound cost. As Kember ['Photography and Realism'] notes, realist photography, informed as it is by Enlightenment philosophy and Cartesian Dualism, 'splits and privileges the mind over the body, the rational over the irrational, culture over nature, the subject over the object and so on along an infinite chain which continues to structure Western Epistemology.'⁸⁰

Duke represents the antidote to a simple bureaucratisation of lived experience. This idea introduces the problematic issue of delegation of professional qualities that can be transferred to human qualities. I would argue that by acting out as the fool, the drunk, the drug induced maniac, Thompson is telling by provoking that intellectual and social distinctions are superficial, and that there is something lost in the mechanical representation of matters, the emotive aspect, and his persona discards fixed representation in favour of a writing a more complex account of the Las Vegas experience. His approach is to convey the experience of his task, according to the traditions of storytelling, and serves to create the atmosphere of the city and the race, and not the factual reality around it. Benjamin defines the radical difference between information and storytelling: 'Information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability.[...] A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.'⁸¹

Having Lacerda play a part in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* serves as a reminder of this, and gives nuance to the text concerning the role that Duke and his attorney are playing out and against, for Thompson's persona represents a departure from a mechanic understanding of the world, and rather goes for a personal and emotionally amplified

80 Alexander, Robert. 'The Right Kind of Eyes': *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a Novel of Journalistic Development.' *Literary Journalism Studies*. Vol.4, No.1, Spring 2012. Web. Accessed February 6, 2014. http://www.ialjs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/019-036_RightKindAlexander.pdf . p22

81 Benjamin, Walter., Harry Zohn. 'The Storyteller – Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov.' *Chicago Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Winter - Spring, 1963), pp. 80-101. Web. Accessed February 6, 2014. [Http://www.jstor.org/stable/25293714](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25293714) .pp4,5

retraction of it.

Having this in mind, the surface story about a drug binge becomes something else in the light of the carnivalesque, where the deliberate opting out of conventional standards suddenly gains texture and relevance. Where mainstream coverage becomes insufficient as conveyor of lived experience, a carnivalesque approach combining what seems to be and comparing it with the context, does more to the story than any statistic would do. The result in this example is that the story becomes a meta-narrative, showing how Thompson plays with established structures and making them fit into his own performance. As Stull points out in terms of how Thompson's text serves as a comment on representational writing:

'Thompson parodies the harried journalist working under deadline pressure and testifies to the 'gibberish' produced under such circumstances, thereby criticizing one of the constraints of mainstream journalism.[...] Thompson finds himself inextricably caught up in a system he desires to criticize and separate himself from. Thompson very self-consciously comments on the limitations of journalism, and in so doing is able to exercise a certain freedom within a medium that militates against creative indulgence.'⁸²

The implications of this critique is that it counts for several aspects of civilised society, and this is where Thompson's texts take hold as performing a social comment. The relevance is effectuated by the use of these different view-points and how they work on each other. I will show how the following example is grounded in an unstable mind, that becomes more understandable to the reader by how the attorney reacts to a scene from the news, thereby explaining what appears to be, in light of the context. The passage is polyglot by showing where literary coverage meets TV coverage, and where a derailed mindset and source of communication meet a mindset and source of communication that is felt equally derailed by the addressee:

'The TV news was about the Laos Invasion- a series of horrifying disasters: explosions and twisted wreckage, men fleeing in terror, Pentagon generals babbling insane lies. 'Turn that shit off!' screamed my attorney 'Let's get out of here!' A wise move. Moments after we picked up the car my attorney went into a drug coma and ran a red light on Main Street before I could bring us under control.'⁸³

The paradox in this passage is realized in the juxtaposing of the anti-social behaviour of the two drug-dilettantes breaking all social norms on their way, with the real horrors from the all too realistic actuality of the war and its horrific impact on innocent bystanders. The reminder of the horrors of war through the TV- screen is too difficult to cope with for these

⁸² James N. Stull. *Literary Selves- Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction..* Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1993. p98

⁸³ Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. pp28,29

two who are escaping social inhibitions in the first place. Hellman interprets this episode in terms of the soothing comfort of Duke's and the attorney's denial of conventional norms:

'Thompson includes some of these stories in paragraph-length excerpts, so that their 'objective' prose stands in counterpoint to the book's agitated style. As a result, the reader himself returns to the hallucinatory and comic narrative with the same relief that the persona feels when he returns to the hallucinations and comic adventures. The parodic invention which is this 'report' becomes itself both defense and escape for the reader.'⁸⁴

The official rhetoric that Thompson presents is relevant to express how the official scheme and politics, and maintenance of its social control, seems absurd for ordinary men and women just wanting to live their lives the safest way possible. Compared with the irrationality of political endorsement, Duke and the attorney suddenly come forth as reasonable subjects, or not less reasonable than the act of war and the politics behind it. And this was all because of communist and capitalist disagreement on social and economical values. Again, the story favours the newsworthiness from experience as opposed to the construction of mechanical news. Thompson's sharing of instinctive behaviour comes off as authentic and genuine.

Thompson manages to enact the cause and effect of his chosen role as an outsider, as opposed to the more superficial explanation for the rationale of the Hell's Angels discourse, of which Thompson intellectually interpreted and discussed. What Thompson conveys here, is the personal and emotional motivation behind his actions, as a writer who is known for his tendency to advocate for outsiders and deviants. Opting out of intellectual reasoning seems like the only sane thing to do. To seek new ways of discussing meaning in the vast realm of disguised meaninglessness is described through the means of fiction, describing fictionally how real and actual situations are experienced and digested through radical coping mechanisms. By applying the use of polyglot comparison, in this case, Thompson is employing the carnivalesque mode of his interpretation and expression of American culture in the early 1970s.

Hiebert suggests that the subversion of social hierarchies involves the subversion of one's own role, as Thompson's persona Duke is an example of throughout the book:

'A critique then that is always, at least in part, aimed at oneself and one's participation in social institutions and official ideologies. In other words, though the carnival does subvert a social hierarchy, it also functions as the simultaneous subversion of one's own place in these structures.[...] Not a stepping out of the roles one normally plays, but a stepping into a role that mocks the limitations imposed upon oneself, limitations that one both upholds and subverts in carnival participation.'⁸⁵

84 John Hellman. *Fables of Fact*. Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1981. p78

85 Hiebert, Ted 'Becoming Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity', *Performance Research*, 8(3), pp 113-

Thompson thus refuses to play along with the harsh reality of the society he lives in, and parodically indulges in a life-style where he can happily turn off the TV and drive around contemplating his own reflections while simultaneously acknowledging that his thoughts and actions are off track. In other words, in this narrative, Thompson's persona steps into a role that mocks but also challenges the roles he is expected to play.

3.2 Satirical fear and loathing.

Raoul Duke and Dr. Gonzo, the Samoan attorney, are acting out their primal thoughts, desires and fears in the book, and the effect on the story is the creation of absurd humour and at times obscene reasoning and behaviour. My first example speaks of Duke's satirical presence at a drug convention, and in the second, his reflections upon himself as petty conman is juxtaposed with serious tragedy, affirming the sober reasoning behind his anti-hero position. In my third example Thompson leaves his character behind, and satirises in his nostalgic recap of the propensity of people to fall under the spell of 'absolute wisdom'. These three examples are different in their approach, but in terms of Thompson's role in the story, they all fall in under the reflections of the persona, and should be read as the sometimes sober reflections and experiences of Duke.

Duke performs the role of the trickster in some of his satirical outbursts, in which his attitude is shameless and irreverent of conventional enactments of the social hierarchy, although the prank is played out in the text, making it into a reading experience only. An example in which this occurs is happening when Thompson is told to go back to Las Vegas to cover the National District Attorney's Drug Conference, and dutifully does so induced with a variety of mescaline, acid and grass, and the following passage is Duke's reflection on the quality of the conference:

'There was simply no call, at this conference, for anything but a massive consumption of Downers: Reds, Grass and Booze, because the whole program had apparently been set up by people who had been in a Seconal Stupor since 1964. Here were more than a thousand top-level cops telling each other 'we *must* come to terms with the drug culture', but they had no idea where to start. They couldn't even *find* the goddamn thing. There were rumours in the hallways that maybe the Mafia was behind it. Or perhaps the Beatles. At one point somebody asked Bloomquist if he thought Margaret Mead's 'strange behaviour', of late, might possibly be explained by a private marijuana addiction. 'I really don't know,' Bloomquist replied. 'But at her age, if she did smoke grass, she'd have one hell of a trip.' The audience

roared with laughter at his remark.⁸⁶

Here, Thompson directly addresses the hypocrisy and ignorance played out by chosen representatives from the law-enforcement. The cop's remark about Margaret Mead⁸⁷ is read in retrospect as chauvinistic and of double-standards, at a conference in Las Vegas agreeing on symptoms and signs to unveil drug abuse while keeping up their ignorant lifestyle. Thompson further ridicules the randomness of both his and the cops' behaviour at the scene, an attitude that is reinforced by subtly bringing to attention that there are people out there who actually do good for others, making the rhetoric at the scene seem ridiculous. The episode is further amplified by the two characters' propensity to thoroughly be at terms with the drug culture. This is where the trickster role comes in, acting out on established prejudice. By being there, Duke and the Samoan indirectly ridicule the sensationalist image of deviants. Placing these two opposite life-approaches side by side on paper is magnifying the effect of the hollow depth in stereotypical categorisation. Resonating with this example is Franchot Ballinger's description of the Trickster as an ambivalent agent in society's performance:

'In much recent Trickster writing, this equation has been developed by emphasizing Trickster as the creatively antinomian overreacher transgressing the artificial codes of society and the categories of human perception that give rise to those codes. The argument in brief, is that Trickster's violative behaviour places him at the margin of or even beyond the social pale; from such a vantage point he liberates humans from conventional social moral boundaries and dramatizes new ways of perceiving and the possibility of new orders.'⁸⁸

In my interpretation this episode serves as an example of how the fears of violations against man made rules affect peoples' behaviour, when the dangerous people the cops are describing are sitting right next to them and posing no threat to their lives and well-being. What does it mean then when people who do not have a clue about real life are supposed to uphold peace among people of which real dangers they fail to recognise? When all it looks like from the outside is just another play of words and concepts in order to look good and to rise in the social hierarchy? The satire in this example lies in how Thompson demonstrates a tendency in social beings to hold on to simplified ideas of good and bad, and even when people do good in an unconventional manner, they are stigmatised as odd and curious. The

86 Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. p144

87 A renowned anthropologist who studied the interconnection of all human endeavour as dependent on one another; 'She believed that cultural patterns of racism, warfare, and the environmental exploitation were learned, and that the members of a society could work together to modify their traditions and to construct new institutions. <http://www.interculturalstudies.org/Mead/biography.html> .Accessed May 4,2014.

88 Ballinger, Franchot. 'Living Sideways: Social Themes and Social Relationships in Native American Trickster Tales.'*American Indian Quarterly*, Vol.13, No. 1 (Winter, 1989), pp15-30. Web. Accessed January 14,2014. [Http://www.jstor.org/stable/1184084](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1184084) . p 15

carnavalesque attitude in Thompson then is the following logic: 'Sympathy? Not for me. No mercy for a criminal freak in Las Vegas. This place is like the Army: the shark ethic prevails-eat the wounded. In a closed society where everybody's guilty, the only crime is getting caught. In a world of thieves, the only final sin is stupidity.'⁸⁹

Part of the characteristic function of Thompson's persona is to bring attention to the prevailing norms in society, and doing so not by being a good example, but rather the opposite, and as a reaction to the state of things. Ballinger suggests the main drive of the Trickster to revolt against society's structure stems from the rigidity of highly normative societies: '[...], and then return to our delight in the comically rebellious Trickster, and perceive him as a psychic release from social repression.'⁹⁰

Thompson's persona plays at times this part in the narrative as the embodiment of confrontation against outdated ideas of social justice. His is a reaction to artificial social schemes, structures and attitudes that are irreverent of actual desires, needs and ideals of social beings. The anti-hero provokes with his anti-social behaviour, but he has emerged as a result of social behaviour gone astray from higher ideals, and invites to a re-discussion of the conventional values and attitudes in modern societies, with which he wants to contribute.

The challenge, with this kind of satire is that it offers no solution to illusions. Further, it feeds on the paradoxes from which it stems from. Robert N. Spicer refers to an invented term by Jack Bratich (2010) that describes this kind of satirical comment, 'snarkasm': '...a combination of sarcasm and snark, that 'is a type of ironic consumption, but one particularly characterized by fascination, the vexing vacillation between attraction and repulsion.'⁹¹

Only when one reads the 'snarkasm' as a personal experience of alienation, does the seemingly indulgent ridicule of the state of affairs bear some recognition and social value, for Thompson's satire is an ironic consumption, both provoked and playing along simultaneously. In addition, this 'snarkasm' comes across as a desire to share observations of incoherence in ideals of civilised behaviour, and the actual performance of it. Again, this resonate with the narrative approach Thompson employs that touches upon the qualities of storytelling: '[...], counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a

89 Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. p72

90 Ballinger, Franchot. 'Living Sideways: Social Themes and Social Relationships in Native American Trickster Tales.'*American Indian Quarterly*, Vol.13, No. 1 (Winter, 1989), pp15-30. Web. Accessed January 14,2014. p15

91 Robert N.Spicer . 'Before and After the Daily Show', in *The Daily Show and Rhetoric- Arguments, Issues, and Strategies*. (ed) Trischa Goodnow. Lanham, Boulder, New York: Lexington Books, 2011. p25

story.⁹² His literary strategy involving distortion of social aspects, and jokingly conveying the absurdity of the modern condition, serves to counteract antagonism as to his radical social revolt as fiendish, and is rather received as an attempt to comment on an ongoing social tendency, with glee and with indignation simultaneously, as to show the reader that these attitudes are actually flourishing, and to invite to an assessment of this.

To establish of what Duke is up against, he narrates his ironical and provocative attitude side by side with what stimulates his anti-social revolt. In the next example, Duke reads the newspaper, and finds solace in his behaviour, but the anti-hero in him is fed with reasons to revolt, as a comment on the state of affairs in American society:

'TRIO RE-ARRESTED IN BEATY'S DEATH – GI DRUG DEATHS CLAIMED- TORTURE TALES TOLD IN WAR HEARINGS- FIVE WOUNDED NEAR NYC TENEMENT- PHARMACY OWNER ARRESTED IN PROBE. Reading the front page made me feel a lot better. Against that heinous background, my crimes were pale and meaningless. I was a relatively respectable citizen- a multiple felon, perhaps, but certainly not dangerous. And when the Great Scorer came to write against my name, that would surely make a difference. Or would it? I turned to the sports page and saw a small item about Muhammad Ali; his case was before the Supreme Court, the final appeal. He'd been sentenced to five years in prison for refusing to kill 'slopes'. 'I ain't got nothin' against them Viet Congs,' he said. Five years.'⁹³

In this passage, Thompson compares the gravity of his behaviour with the gravity of greater society's impact on people. He tacitly acknowledges his own rebellious attitude, and provides more serious examples that make his role seem as a corrective one. Personal ideals and convictions are sidestepped by political ambitions, indicating the range of social control by society on individual expression. Putting these headlines side by side creates a chaotic feeling, and unveils the degrees of sanctions if a person goes against social conventionalism.

Again, as with the last example, Thompson draws in to the narrative individuals that are challenging social continuity by acting different but idealistic. His own is the role of challenging the rationale behind social behaviour, by inflating his own as well as his subject's delusional behaviour. The anti-hero is present in this example, by arguing against sanctioned injustice, cloaked in established concepts of right and wrong. Satire thus works in this passage to ridicule strict social condemning, where in the face of the majority the right and humanistic thing is judged to be unpatriotic and a threat to society. The violence and frauds committed by civilians are compared to the violence and frauds committed by government forces. The satire

92 Benjamin, Walter., Harry Zohn. 'The Storyteller – Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov.' Chicago Review, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Winter - Spring, 1963), pp. 80-101. Web. Accessed February 6, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25293714> . p3

93 Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. pp72,73,74

is therefore expressed to suggest that concepts of right and wrong behaviour should be recontextualised, by moving away from simple geo-political and economic interests into more humanistic, informed and philosophical parameters for acceptable social behaviour.

What Thompson does with his satire is to reveal ignorance and a self-serving attitude in people that is sanctioned by the established cultural and social institutions. He recognises his part in it – albeit with self-reflexivity, which enables him to claim reason in his deductions. Thompson refuses to play a successful part if it involves that he must pretend to embrace social roles that are neither genuine nor complex enough to embrace the diversity of qualities inherent in the human psyche. Or rather, social roles that are not true to the potential of humans, but degrading them into inhibiting roles that serve as a controlling mechanism for individuals to be productive in a modern society.

The last example I will use to show the satirical critique in *'Fear and Loathing'* is void of humour, but spirited in terms of rhetoric, Thompson's forte. This example deals with the stupidity in passive consumerism, an example that it is not just the police-force that act hypocritical, but numbness of the mind is to be found among spiritual seekers also, and this example is juxtaposed with Thompson's approach and behaviour as a conscious distancing from flawed ideals and norms, only accepting the responsibility for it:

'No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them. All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours, too. What Leary took down with him was the central illusion of a whole life-style that he helped to create...a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody- or at least some *force*- is tending that Light at the end of the tunnel. This is the same cruel and paradoxically benevolent bullshit that has kept the Catholic Church going for so many centuries. It is also the military ethic... a blind faith in some higher and wiser 'authority'. The Pope, the General, The Prime Minister...all the way up to 'God.' One of the crucial moments of the Sixties came on that day when the Beatles cast their lot with the Maharishi. It was like Dylan going to the Vatican to kiss the Pope's ring. First 'gurus.' Then, when that didn't work, back to Jesus. And now, following Manson's primitive /instinct lead, a whole new wave of clan-type commune Gods like Mel Lyman, ruler of Avatar, and What's His Name who runs 'Spirit and Flesh.'"⁹⁴

This passage compared to the ridicule of inherent fears and institutionalised categorisation is brought to bear meaning in a larger context by linking the day to day enactments of these ideological attitudes with a general tendency in the lives of modern men and women. That is, maintaining blind faith in agents that have acquired the right to promote

94 Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. pp178,179

just and true values, as opposed to nurturing a healthy and sovereign relationship to these issues on the grounds of personal and humanistic ideals. Thompson critiques this mind-numbing relocation of true spirituality from the personal self to acknowledged and institutionalised fora of 'peace and love'. All of these satirical examples and comments resonate in different ways and from different angles with the categorization of the Menippean satire coined by Robert Elliott:

'The Menippean Satire deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from social behaviour. The Menippean Satire thus resembles the confession in its ability to handle abstract ideas and theories, and differs from the novel in its characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent.'⁹⁵

The examples of satirical critique that I have provided thus far are influenced by the critical notion of people who act more as mouthpieces rather than naturalistic and genuine voices in the crowd; Bloomquist at the D.A. Convention, the Supreme Court condemning Muhammad Ali's humane refusal to kill Vietnamese people, and the unquestioning belief in the sanctity of authority. Thompson uses the word 'blind faith' for what it is, hesitance to think for oneself. His ironical anti-hero serves to connect all these observations together, as social aspects that need to be addressed. Put next to his own tendency to provoke, his behaviour comes off as healthy and grounded in comparison, that being satirical in itself.

3.3 Enacting Grotesque resistance.

In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* grotesque enactments stand out as being a main rhetorical device in terms of the shock value of the book. The grotesque is rather enacted and observed than it is described through abnormalities. Within the exaggerated and excessive behaviour of the two main characters and their observations on the state of the American culture embodied in the simulacra of Las Vegas, the carnivalesque approach is playing with the state of social experience, offering a way out of shallow values through acting out the excess of Las Vegas as far as possible, and thereby addressing ideas of normality. Thus, the distorted and exaggerated perspective is presenting the strict inhibiting norms for social conduct that Thompson argues to be the main disease with his contemporary society, arguably leading to an acknowledgement of a collective need to think again.

95 Robert C.Elliott. *The Power of Satire*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972. p187

At the end of things, there is creativity in going wild and indulging in enjoyment and festivities, but in the society as a whole these indulgences are sanctioned and relegated to confined spaces and not expected to carry on in daily life. What Duke and the Samoan do is to challenge the social expectations of limited and sanctioned fun. What I read from the following examples is a notion that social reality has absurd structural parameters for entertainment and enjoyment, for outside of these sanctioned spaces, the norms are stricter and controlling of primal urges. The result is a journey through the mental landscape of the grotesque that comes out as a questioning of the social structure that allows such temporal outbursts of otherwise locked in desires. In agreement with the line of argument in satirical approaches, the degree of social constraint is equivalent with the degree of social opposition. In the next passage Thompson describes the hotel suite after a night he cannot remember, and we follow him through the suite as he tries to remember how the room came into such a state:

'The room was full of used towels; they were hanging everywhere. The bathroom floor was about six inches deep with soap bars, vomit, and grapefruit rinds, mixed with broken glass. I had to put my boots on every time I went in there to piss. The nap of the mottled grey rug was so thick with marijuana seeds that it appeared to be turning green. The general back-alley ambience of the suite was so rotten so incredibly foul, that I figured I could probably get away with claiming it was some kind of 'Life-slice exhibit' that we'd brought down from Haight Street, to show cops from other parts of the country how deep into filth and degeneracy the drug people will sink, if left to their own devices.[...]But then why all this booze? And these crude pornographic photos, ripped out of pulp magazines like *Whores of Sweden* and *Orgies in the Casbah*, that were plastered on the broken mirror with smears of mustard that had dried to a hard yellow crust...and all these signs of violence, these strange red and blue bulbs and shards of broken glass embedded in the wall plaster...No, these were not the hoofprints of your normal, godfearing junkie. It was far too savage, too aggressive. There was evidence, in this room, of excessive consumption of almost every type of drug known to civilized man since 1544 A.D. It could only be explained as a *montage*, a sort of exaggerated medical exhibit, put together very carefully to show what might happen if twenty-two serious drug felons-each with a *different* addiction- were penned up together in the same room for five days and nights, without relief. Indeed. But of course that would never happen in Real Life, gentlemen. We just put this thing together for *demonstration* purposes...'⁹⁶

This passage is rendered grotesque due to the senseless destruction and lack of consideration for other's property, only amusing in addition, for Thompson expresses amazement of their capacity for senseless behaviour. How does this scene function as being provocative towards conventional standards for behaviour? It does not appear to have any built-in moral, but it can rather be read as a reaction against normalcy that disguises its chaotic components behind an agreed upon rationale. MacFarlane suggests that the drug-

96 Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. pp187,188

binge can be read as a 'quid pro quo':

'Thompson's exaggerated humor toward his madcap binge seems to ask that it be dismissed as good, wild fun. This notwithstanding, the only justification for these actions must stem from the belief that two wrongs make a right. In other words, big business and big government are so corrupt that the abuse of their property in this random way is legitimized.'⁹⁷

In other words, the story is a literary crazed outburst, but in all its hilarity and inexplicable reasoning, in line with MacFarlane's interpretation, it manages to comment on the state of affairs, both on a personal level and a political level, comparing the private destruction with a recurring official intrusion on the self. This attitude can be compared with the excessive behaviour of the Angels, as dealt with in the previous chapter, only Thompson narrates this out of control behaviour with an intent to create an afterthought, to challenge the idea of man and woman as inherently reasonable and reflective. In this passage he embraces the deviant stereotype, and act the part that society is looking down upon, as an indirect resistance. Where the grotesque makes an impact, lies in the expectancy of it to be enacted with a purpose, of which this example even creates doubts about, but Krzychylkiewicz refers to, in this connection, the 'perverse glee' that the grotesque triggers: 'And it is the reader's 'response' the grotesque seeks, to capture his attention and to upset the comfort of his petty-bourgeois lifestyle.[...] By its extraordinary nature the belligerent grotesque work precalculates a certain quality and intensity of emotional response.'⁹⁸

This meaningless binge-destruction that is excessive and exaggerated creates a sense of pointlessness, unless we read it in terms of its shock value on the finer senses. It is between the normal and the abnormal that this scene makes sense, as Thompson's reaction to internal pressures by responding equivalently to the degree of social pressure he experiences. While a certain amount of angst and alienation is expressed indirectly through such excessive behaviour, there is simultaneously a sense of independent and playful opposition in Thompson's description of events. Thompson's role as both the writer and actor in his example gets added meaning by interpreting his role as the anti-hero trickster, having left behind aspirations of fitting in and receiving social recognition, for the reason that he seeks more genuine modes of expression by first acting against conventional expectations. Stanford argues similarly in locating the mindset and the function of the modern trickster:

'The underground man is a victim of these social forces outside him that have produced, as we have

97 Scott MacFarlane. *The Hippie Narrative- A Literary Perspective on the Counterculture*. Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: MacFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2007. p186

98 Krzychylkiewicz, Agata. 'Towards the understanding of the modern grotesque.' *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19.2 (June 2003): pp 205-228. (c) COPYRIGHT 2003 Literator Society of South Africa. Web. Accessed May 14, 2014. <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=g792506515~tab=summary> . p221

seen, a profound loss of identity and hence alienation within. But he differs from the protagonist of the naturalistic novel in that he can dramatize his conflicts by protest, so that we can understand them and hence ourselves.[...] Therefore Hamlet and Dostoevsky's underground hero are equally 'pioneers in the life of the spirit' to one critic, because they both reject apathy and conformity in order to seek understanding at all costs.⁹⁹

The grotesque, and in *Fear and Loathing* that is mainly excessive and deviant behaviour, is enacted and described in a sardonic manner, with a self-regarding eye to the parodic quality of maintained illusions and mindless consumption and entertainment that Thompson finds in Las Vegas. I would argue that Thompson- through 'Duke'- has found a way to cope with the inconsistencies in society and he is thriving on the edge of reason alongside with conventional society, for that is where true experience and social understanding are to be found. Further, while Thompson describes the absurdity of contemporary civilised society through his own personal crazed reaction to it, his role as a deviant serves to make obvious where the acceptable social limit is drawn, and also reminds conventional society of its inherent aspirations and goals for progress, for his deviant enactments are at the end of it an extension of already established norms and social structures. Thompson uses grotesque behaviour as a narrative device to show the effects of strict, shame-based and self-deceived standards and norms in his own contemporaneity. The trickster role is therefore Thompson's point of departure as a persona, and he shocks his way through concepts of social standards and civilian expectations.

Reaching for true experience and the desire for transcending the limitation of social experience is exemplified in the following episode, where the attorney goes to lengths to get the high that he is sensing in the horizon:

'I grabbed it away from his hand. ' You fool!' I said. ' Get back in that tub! Get away from that goddamn radio!' I shoved it back from his hand. The volume was so far up that it was hard to know what was playing unless you knew Surrealistic Pillow almost note for note...which I did, at the time, so I knew that 'White Rabbit' had finished; the peak had come and gone. But my attorney, it seemed, had not made it. He wanted more. ' Back the tape up!' he yelled. 'I need it again!' His eyes were full of craziness now, unable to focus. He seemed on the verge of some awful psychic orgasm... 'Let it roll!' he screamed. 'Just as high as the fucker can go! And when it comes to that fantastic note where the rabbit bites its own head off, I want you to throw that fuckin radio into the tub with me.'[...] I hit the 'play' button, and 'White Rabbit' started building again. Almost immediately he began to howl and moan...another fast run up that mountain, and thinking, this time, that he would finally get over the top. His eyes were gripped

99 Stanford, Raney. ' The Return of the Trickster: When a not-a-hero is a hero.' The journal of popular culture, Volume 1, Issue 3, pages 228-243, Winter 1967. Article first published online: 5 Mars 2004. Web. Accessed May 15,2014. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1967.0103_228.x/abstract;jsessionid=B8D1A0227DADD6973BE35B4CADB8B16D.f03t02 . pp233,234

shut and only his head and both kneecaps poked up through the oily green water.'¹⁰⁰

This episode comes out as an insane attempt to achieve an out-of-the body experience, the ultimate orgasm for a man whose mind is so affected by drug use that he must search for a high in a possible near-death experience. This indulgence into craziness, and its inherent liberation of social constraints, resonates with the enactments of submission performed by the female members of the motorcycle groups, by finding pleasure in degrading behaviour, and creating their own social definition. Hiebert speaks of the world as a playground in this respect:

'And it is indeed a paradoxical position, for no form is off-limits, not the form of truth, not the form of falsity. A coming to terms with impossible exchange means that the world becomes a playground- its own carnivalesque, in which there is no longer one world to subvert, but as many worlds as we choose to acknowledge (construe).' To challenge and to cope with this paradoxical state of things, we need a paradoxical way of thinking; since the world drifts into delirium, we must adopt a delirious point of view. We must no longer assume any principle of truth, of causality, or any discursive norm. Instead, we must grant both the poetic singularity of events and the radical uncertainty of events. (Baudrillard 2000:68) – And with this paradox comes the removal of the final form of necessity- the necessity of sense. For even sense falls into the scope of impossible exchange, and consequently opens the door for the pursuit of the nonsensical. And not simply a retreat into private fantasies of the world, but an engaged participation with world as an ongoing carnivalesque'¹⁰¹

The effect of a carnivalesque playing with lived experience, and as we have seen- not only for the purpose of demonstration, but also for transcendence of the self -is a liberation from expected standards and rather an exploration of the possibilities of the self. Again, for the two drug-dilettantes the means to enact this liberation and playfulness is by subscribing to illicit substances, but following the line of thought in the previous quote, their liberating tactics are just based in one form, of which there are many. But for the purpose of creating a literary shock-treatment, the grotesque enactment of the removal of sense gives a long lasting impression, and by making a holistic reading of Thompson's story, one can extract his method onto a larger scheme of things, in terms of the incentives from which such a pursuit of the nonsensical arises, and an inherent urge to release the pressure of social constraint, to allow the nonsensical to play a part and to remove the fear of nonsense simultaneously. By distancing oneself from the fear of nonsense one eases the fear of losing one's face and fear of underachievement and unsuccessfulness- for these parameters will arguably change radically

100 Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005. pp59,60

101 Hiebert, Ted 'Becoming Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity', *Performance Research*, 8(3), pp 113-125, © Taylor & Francis Ltd 2003. Web. Accessed March 4,2014.
<http://www.tedhiebert.net/site/downloads/writings/carnival.pdf> . p123

when the social pressure that maintains these aspirations lowers itself. Of course, craving the ultimate orgasmic experience by electrocuting oneself in the bathtub while listening to a powerful song might not be the best way to go, but the impetus behind this scene literally lies in the making of life into a social playground. Krzychylkiewicz further suggests that the grotesque in its representational essence is opposition, which resonates with the example just given: 'Where the grotesque is applied deliberately, Clayborough takes it- not unlike Bakhtin- as a kind of rebellion against systematic thoughts, which in itself implies an emotional attitude on the part of the creator.'¹⁰²

The positive outcome of a rebellion on such a scale is the suspension from social expectations, and the negative aspect lies in the acting out on nonsense without any real thought and serenity behind it. As the next episode will demonstrate, Thompson depicts a nonsensical aspect of the entertainment business in Las Vegas that at the end of it bears no consequence on genuine social thought but rather laughs mindlessly with the established social relations and presenting it as unharmed and purely entertaining, while being mind-numbing:

'Stand in front of this fantastic machine, my friend, and for just 99cents your likeness will appear, two hundred feet tall, on a screen above downtown Las Vegas. Ninety-nine cents more for a voice message. Say whatever you want, fella. They'll hear you, don't worry about that. Remember you'll be two hundred feet tall.' Jesus Christ. I could see myself lying in bed in the Mint Hotel, half-asleep and staring idly out the window, when suddenly a vicious nazi drunkard appears two hundred feet tall in the midnight sky, screaming gibberish at the world: 'Woodstock Über Alles!' We will close the drapes tonight. A thing like that could send a drug person careening around the room like a ping-pong ball. Hallucinations are bad enough. But after a while you learn to cope with things like seeing your dead grandmother crawling up your leg with a knife in her teeth[...] But nobody can handle that other trip- the possibility that any freak with \$ 1.98 can walk into the Circus-Circus and suddenly appear in the sky over downtown Las Vegas twelve times the size of God, howling anything that comes into his head. No, this is not a good town for psychedelic drugs. Reality itself is too twisted.'¹⁰³

The grotesque element in this passage is present in the inflated and exaggerated recreation of the self and the hysterical madness that is reflected in the possibility to appear on a gigantic neon-lit screen for all to see. Perhaps it is the unreality of Las Vegas with no boundaries that prompts this urge. The drug persona supposedly tries to escape emptiness and absurdity, and the passive consumer does the same, although embracing hysterical fantasies of

102 Krzychylkiewicz, Agata. 'Towards the understanding of the modern grotesque.' *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19.2 (June 2003):pp 205-228. (c) COPYRIGHT 2003 Literator Society of South Africa. Web. Accessed May 14,2014. <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=g792506515~tab=summary> .pp207,208
 103 Thompson. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. London: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.p47

greatness for the cost of nothing, a paradox in itself. The tendency of grotesque absurdity in literature is explored by Krzychylkiewicz who establishes that the modern use of the grotesque is expressing the social sentiments in modern times:

'While some point out that the grotesque has been used to portray decadence in society, others note that, through the grotesque, artists express the senselessness of life and the absurdity of modern civilisation. Harpham and many others agree that modern writers find the grotesque to be a particularly suitable tool in expressing both man's 'freakish and absurd nature, and the nightmarish malignancy of the modern world'¹⁰⁴

Thompson sets out to describe and admit both the freakish nature of himself, and his acquaintances, together with the absurd and freakish nature of civilised man. Thompson's eye to self-parody and social critique of the greater American society in the early 70s is descriptive of the complexities in the human psyche, for he dives into the social scene and takes note of his own behaviour as well as the observations he make. Therefore the critique of a society that promotes a distancing from the self by replacing it with simple entertainment and encouragement of the individual consumer to consume more simple entertainment and remain content and passive, comes out as genuine, even though Thompson fails to be a good example. Humour is his weapon, and dumbness and inflated personalities, his target.

Fear and Loathing is an experimental voyage into the minds of two self-chosen outsiders who indulge into psychedelics in order to let the thoughts flow without systematic thought, and to address their instincts without conventional boundaries. This attitude is established in the first examples, where Duke juxtaposes his strategy to the established strategy of formal representation allowing both the mind and the body to play a part. To dive then into the world of irresponsible fun and, as a bi-effect, paranoia, is a more tempting option than to participate in the social power-plays that are just for show, and those shows are just as bad as any angst-ridden LSD trips, so Duke accepts the challenge and goes Gonzo. *Fear and Loathing* is the book in which Thompson indulges the Gonzo style to the fullest, and produces a story that in its entirety plays with the horizons of social perception, in which a deliberate enlargement and distortion of social norms is necessary in order to seek out new social frontiers.

Thompson does not hesitate to go full-on against flawed social mechanisms that urges people to indulge superficial values and mindless consumption, and Thompson criticises what he describes as corrupted communities, in subcultures as well as in greater societies, and even

104 Krzychylkiewicz, Agata. 'Towards the understanding of the modern grotesque.' Journal of Literary Studies. 19.2 (June 2003):pp 205-228. (c) COPYRIGHT 2003 Literator Society of South Africa. Web. Accessed May 14,2014. <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=g792506515~tab=summary> .p217

in the understanding of a self. In some of the examples I have focused on his chosen role as the trickster who disturbs ideals of social compromise and harmony, of which Thompson aggressively counteracts and disrupts in the text. The satirical examples change between a self-ironical to anxious attitude, building up under the reasoning behind wanting to let go of conventional restraints. As opposed to the inward-looking overview in *Hell's Angels*, *Fear and Loathing* narrates a corrective impulse to enact the far end of social norms, to engage a sense of reflection in the readers. The actor/writer symbiosis in its self-reflexivity allows Thompson to connect his emotions and thoughts onto paper, without restrictions, and allows him to use his own name to make the fiction appear as a true mirror of reality.

Thompson shares his inner vision with the license of a journalist who has the appointed right to describe what goes on in society. The actor/writer gone anti-hero provides his social critique by describing how social influences affect him, and simultaneously he challenges these social influences by exaggerating his scope of vision. As an effect, the self-referential narrative tries to exemplify individual assessment, for others to follow, by eroding the bourgeois ego-boundaries, in order to relate to social surroundings based on the experiences of the self. As he does exactly this in his satire and indulging of the grotesque, his narrative outburst stands out as a suitable response to the absurdity of the modern condition.

The first section in this chapter dealt with the reasoning behind Thompson's chosen approach in the narrative, enabling inner perception to be a part of the unfolding story, choosing the approach of the counsel in storytelling instead of a rational and mechanical approach to the dissemination of the events. As a red thread throughout the narrative, the trickster impulse is present in the story, but the incentive to perform such a role is also a part of the development in the narrative, making *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* a story where the development of Thompson's persona leads the way in the story that eventually becomes a voyage recounting incidents of action and reaction, through the mind of a drug-induced satirist who documents on the go, adding to the social foundations of the American cultural psyche. The shock-tactics in Thompson's narrative, embedded with dialogue, satire and grotesque depictions becomes then a description of the contemporary state of affairs, as rendered through the at times delusional observations and actions of a mind challenging itself and society.

4 The Great Shark Hunt- Strange Tales from a Strange Time

‘When the going gets weird the weird turn pro.’ - Raoul Duke'

A number of articles from throughout Thompson's career are collected in this book, with articles written from his early career as a journalist for the *National Observer* from 1962, to his published articles in the *Rolling Stone Magazine* up to 1978. The collected articles are representative of the development of Thompson's own personal Gonzo style, from the early investigative and participatory new journalism style to the performance and reality based autobiographical fiction of his later works. Whereas *Hell's Angels* was investigative in its exploration of a subculture's cultural psyche and reception, and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was an experiment within the genre of autobiographical narrative imbued with alternative perceptions and the limits of the performing self, *The Great Shark Hunt* offers Gonzo journalism concerned with connecting global aspects with local aspects. The two former books dealt with specific issues: the maintenance of flawed categorization and continued separation and alienation of social spheres, the unreality of inflated social hierarchies and the continuation of passive consumerism at the cost of genuine reflection and progression, and a challenge to what is valuable in life.

In *The Great Shark Hunt*, compiled as it is of reflections, observations, and enactments of issues such as politics, the counterculture, the Gringo, the lives of authors, of superstars and so on, Thompson's short stories, as I read them rather than articles, deal with the consequences of alienation and how individuals make an effort to relate to the modern state of being, either playfully or as best they can. The stories reveal how people act within political realities, and go farther away from ideas of social acceptability, and Thompson paints a social picture from above- to low- strata in the *Great Shark Hunt*.

The collection reads as a modern anthropology of American culture during the better parts of the 60s and the 70s. The themes that correlate with the notion of the American carnivalesque, polyglossia, satire and the grotesque make this 'anthropology' a literary mosaic of critique and a celebration of a nation that encompasses multiple variations of human expression and ideals, juxtaposed with the authority, the political apparatus and the entrapment of capitalist values and entertainment. Further, he represents the cynics who know how to use these for their own gain of wealth and power, who personify these institutions and create them in their own image. These short stories offers momentary glimpses into everyday

situations, as in travel literature, rather than being a sustained social argument like in *Hell's Angels*, or narrating a novel about the development of two characters' play with the roles of the self in society in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. His intentions are the same, to address flawed and superficial social structures, but the approach is read differently.

Thompson gives voice to the social elements in American culture that make up the whole entity, and expresses his views with the intent to reach out to peoples' interpretive sentiments by challenging social myths and traditions.

In other words, *The Great Shark Hunt* has a greater scope than the previous books, in that it covers more social ground and creates an image of how Thompson perceives the structures in society that keep people from being active participants in the maintenance of a flourishing and reflective society. Certainly, Thompson's strategy is at risk of being disregarded as ego-centric jibberish, but the rhetoric is his way of providing new grounds of discussion. Greg Wright writes of the literary, political and legal strategies of Thompson as accentuating the status quo:

'In order to depict the world in its craziness, Acosta and Thompson adopt a critical lens of exaggeration in order to accentuate the insanity, often coming off as jabbering extremists themselves. Basically, the choice presents itself, through Acosta and Thompson's words, as being between recognizing a lunatic system or disregarding lunatic individuals.[...] Hunter S. Thompson almost always categorizes his perennial 'fear and loathing' as one of many by-products of the forms of sinister madness exhibited by a depraved and perverted America; his often chaotic texts delve into their slippery generic territory as a result of his work's attempt to differentiate between what is 'really out there' and what is not.'¹⁰⁵

In this respect, the exaggerating traits in Thompson's works are deliberately emphasized in order to create the awareness needed in a otherwise disregarded and taken for granted social discourse. This quote was interpreting *Fear and Loathing*, but I have included it here as it applies to *The Great Shark Hunt* in its description of Thompson's approach to his stories as the mediator. The difference in this anthology is the way it also portrays individuals who are not acting out their reaction to changing social circumstances, but rather become passive appropriators of social demands. The Angels and Duke in their respective narratives found their own way of responding to artificial and superficial dogma in the social domain. But many of the subjects in the following extracts are rather caught up in these, and Thompson- the rogue journalist- attempts to capture the bitter-sweet sentiment in these

105 Greg Wright. 'The Literary, Political, and Legal Strategies of Oscar Zeta Acosta and Hunter S. Thompson: Intertextuality, Ambiguity, and (Naturally) Fear and Loathing.' *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Volume 43, Issue 3, pages 622-643, June 2010. Article first published online: 25 May 2010. Web. Accessed April 5, 2013. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2010.00761.x/full> p4,5

examples.

Thompson's propensity to look to the left and into unknown social territory stems from a deliberate political stance, according to Jirón-King:

'Thompson seeks out incongruities and creates a disruptive discourse as a form of literary/journalistic intervention. The text itself becomes an act of protest; the Gonzo narrator becomes a protester-participant as he calls attention to the crisis of conventionality and the inability of the normative narrative to account for the continuous fissures in the social and economic domain. War, riots, political scandal, the increasing suppression of information-- and the demise of critical consciousness. Gonzo writing is akin to setting oneself on fire in a crowded square. Instead of delivering a disinterested account of events, Thompson selects his details and unapologetically creates a 'spin', insisting upon the importance of authorial insight, favouring interpretation, intuition, and a cinematographic ideal that emphasizes a narrative of disruption.'¹⁰⁶

Thompson offers us a refashioned interpretation of how society works, one that is subjective and biased, but engaged, uncompromising and not sensitive to the established social structure and national self-image. Intuition and personal perception are favoured over constructed images and cultural affiliations.

The Great Shark Hunt is, compared to the two other works that I have dealt with, more focused on the theme of polyglossia and satire, while the grotesque excessiveness is always present through the critical lens of the Gonzo -approach to the interpretation of social events and social experience. I will show how dialogue and conversation with other world-views and representations of truth are being worked and evaluated by Thompson's diverging view on politics, culture and economical issues. Polyglossia is present in all of Thompson's utterances, for they are read with actual reality as a back-drop, to which his texts are dynamically communicating with. As Jirón-King suggests to be the driving factor behind the use of subjects and other voices, as well as the impetus behind Thompson's own approach and life style:

'In this Gonzoed world, crazy Samoan lawyers like Acosta, longhairs, hippies, blacks, druggies, and the disenfranchised suddenly gain purchase because it is they who best understand the disruptive forces in-play, and it is they who have the cognitive map with which to demand justice for the exploitation and corruption perpetrated for the rich and powerful.[...]Therefore, while it is true that much of Acosta's as well as Thompson's vulgarity and drug-loving overshadow and sometimes confuse the issue, the vulgarity of their actual lives is purposefully included so as not to become images of the hypocrisy and the corruption all around them. This is where Gonzo succeeds in exposing the hypocrisy of the dominant culture. The warrant informing their work categorizes political and social corruption,

106 Shimmerlee Jirón-King. '*Thompson's and Acostas Collaborative Creation of the Gonzo Narrative Style.*' CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture. Volume 10, Issue 1, Article 5, March 2008. (c) Published by Purdue University Press. Web. Accessed April 4,2013. <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss1/5> .p7

bankrupt systems of government, as a much weightier moral crime than the escapades and the vulgarities that they are so willing to divulge.¹⁰⁷

Again, this quote is taken from an article concerning Thompson's works in general, but mostly his well-known novel *Fear and Loathing*, and I have included it here to emphasize the reasoning behind his chosen approach, and his expressed affiliation with the percentage of the population regarded as outcasts. The satirical intent is a factor within Thompson's own worldview and how he evaluates the matters at hand. It is by showing cultural traditions and social habits in their relative position that Thompson manages to make use of satire as a mirror held up against the conventional mainstream culture in its self-assurance.

Throughout this chapter I will show how the observations Thompson makes on paper are capturing how mechanisms in society create antagonisms and contradictory emotions in men and women, affecting their life style and choices, and even leading them to go against their natural affiliation. By employing satire to unveil the social mechanisms that are taken for granted and left unquestioned, Thompson invites his readers to reassess their own actions and beliefs in the face of informed evaluation. An individual evaluation of social events that take place on the grounds of serious afterthought would benefit any modern society and the citizen's notions of valued presence as participants in a democratic and free society. For even though politicians and well off individuals and companies affect decisions for the majority of any population, Thompson's satire affects the receivers of such politics as well, and demonstrates that independent assessments brings back common sense to the American carnivalesque, even while presented through the voice of a Gonzoist. I will argue that the idealist in Thompson sincerely expresses a belief that independent evaluations of meaning, with awareness of culture as a force, can lessen the fear of otherness by embracing the diversity of human actions. As mentioned earlier, the grotesque element in this book is working its presence in all the articles, even though the subjects Thompson chose to write about are not necessarily excessive, disturbing or abnormal, but there is a feeling in the texts that what is considered normal and conventional is grotesque in his experience. I will provide specific examples of the grotesque, but these are the obvious ones and together they constitute the essence of the American carnivalesque as a whole. In *The Great Shark Hunt* Thompson looks into the carnivalesque aspects of modern American society as it is played out by default, and not deliberately enacted.

107 Shimerlee Jirón-King. 'Thompson's and Acostas Collaborative Creation of the Gonzo Narrative Style.' CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture. Volume 10, Issue 1, Article 5, March 2008. (c) Published by Purdue University Press. Web. Accessed April 4, 2013. <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss1/5> . pp7,3

4.1 In Dialogue with the social contexts in America

Thompson explores the mechanisms behind the understanding of the self in a cultural context. The concept of polyglossia is relevant here, and is defined by its implications and the utterances' point of departure: 'Polyglossia asserts the way in which *context* defines the meaning of utterances, which are polyglot in so far as they put into play a multiplicity of social voices and their individual expressions.'¹⁰⁸

This term describes the narrative strategy that Thompson employs in *The Great Shark Hunt*, the voice of many that create the status quo. If we read his articles as short stories, they assembled become a context, each affected by the other. Thompson is the Gonzo reporter who writes in a spirit of a wild and uninhibited urge to shock and surprise his readers with his alternative perspective. One example of this is referred to in the early publications of Thompson, when he wrote for the *National Observer* in South America:

'Another problem that plagues the gringo is the drink. Because he never really feels at home in a foreign language; because his income is usually embarrassingly large by local standards; because he worries continually about being cheated whenever he buys anything; because he never gets over the feeling that most upper-class Latins consider him a boob from a country where even the boobs are rich; and because he can never understand why people don't seem to like him for what he is- just a good guy who feels a bit out of place among these strange surroundings and customs-because of all these tensions and many more of the same kind, he tends to drink far more than he does at home[...] It is an odd feeling to return from a year in South America and read a book by some expense-account politician who toured the continent in six weeks and spoke only with presidents, cabinet ministers, and other 'leading figures' like himself. The problems and the issues suddenly become quite clear- as they never were when you were right there in the midst of them.'¹⁰⁹

In this passage Thompson refers to the challenges that come to the fore when different contexts encounter one another, where realisations of different contexts confound the notion of absolutism on issues such as observational truth, for everything turns out to be relative. The question of external influences on the inner mobility of the self is brought to attention. Thompson suggests here, in my reading, that where contexts meet, a dialogue in mutual understanding of the complex situation is needed. He poses a rhetorical question in this example; Is this ethically right?

He further argues that the real evaluation of social issues is best sought from the experiences of the everyday life, where political and economical interests have their impact, real impacts that cannot be diagnosed from numbers and statistics. Thompson creates a notion

108 Nikita Brottman. *High theory, low culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. p1

109 Hunter S. Thompson. ' Why Anti-Gringo winds often blow south of the border, *National Observer*, 19 August 1963' in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980. Print. Pp372,373

of uncertainty in the midst of certain life experiences, in which the carnivalesque aspect of modern society is playing out its irony on all levels of society. Such is the exploration of the performance of the postmodern identity, as Ted Hiebert establishes in his essay:

'In other words, the observation of social conditioning does not remove it. It is not a transparent mechanism, but an ingrown one. Read society then as viral, behaviours as conditioned, and voice, inevitably, as possessed. And normalization then becomes a philosophy of possession- 'inner' forces that are derived from with- 'out'.¹¹⁰

This example shows the complexity behind all evaluations of any situation and social tendencies. It shows that people in general rely too much on facts as they are presented through surveys and generally simplified presentations of and by others. This does not only happen between nation-states, but also, as I have shown earlier, between subcultures within a nation, as was done in the example of the Hell's Angels, where the Lynch Report was based on reports from all others than the members themselves.

The Gringo thus travels to South-America with already established pre-conceptions of how he or she shall act within the localities in a foreign culture, and is left dumb-founded when the expectations and the preparations do not receive the expected response. Thompson's role in this article is as the one who comes to realize this challenge from experience, not from intellectual reasoning, suggesting how social boundaries are sometimes confounding the real state of affairs. I assess this example to be not so much as a questioning of different realities, as it highlights the need for a realisation and a reconciliation of the changes and differences in societies. The coming to terms with this realisation can lead to an increased awareness of diversity in social awareness, and thus to refrain from taking these issues for granted and rather accept that some things have their own rationale and that these differences are not insurmountable. By realising the effects of one's own actions and rationale, Thompson gives an incentive to think more independently and to seek things out for oneself and right to the core of matters, not only official representations.

I see here the early seeds of Thompson's future literary signature; to go behind the scenes to see what really goes on, and to present them in such a way that the message comes forth as disarming and self-parodical. Thompson's point here is best interpreted as a comment on how evaluations of social conditions suffer from an unnatural division between fields and concepts, followed by a realisation that all is connected, and information can sometimes miss

110 Ted Hiebert. '*Becoming Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity*', *Performance Research*, 8(3), pp 113-125, © Taylor & Francis Ltd 2003. Web. Accessed March 4, 2014.
<http://www.tedhiebert.net/site/downloads/writings/carnival.pdf> p117

the humanistic knowledge of lived experience.

This realisation is echoed by Edward Said, whose reflection upon the division of fields affects the level of engagement considering independent thinking:

'It is my conviction that culture works very effectively to make invisible and even 'impossible' the actual affiliations that exist between the world of ideas and scholarship, on the one hand, and the world of brute politics, corporate and state power, and military force, on the other. The cult of expertise and professionalism, for example, has so restricted our scope of vision that a positive (as opposed to an implicit or passive) doctrine of noninterference among fields has set in. This doctrine has it that the general public is best left ignorant, and the most crucial policy questions affecting human existence are best left to 'experts', specialists who talk about their speciality only, and [...] people (usually men) who are endowed with the special privilege of knowing how things really work and, more important, of being close to power.[...] Humanistic culture in general has acted in tacit compliance with this anti-democratic view, the more regrettably since, both in their formulation and in the politics they have given rise to, so-called policy issues can hardly be said to enhance human community.'¹¹¹

Thompson's own writing confronts these issues, and the author and the persona evaluate the experiences he makes on account of what he observes and partakes in. This is one approach to the understanding of social boundaries that goes beyond the established path to knowledge, an approach that changes information into knowledge according to experience. In my opinion, this strategy that Thompson performs is in tune with his social intent, in which it reads as an inclination to seek knowledge from contextual understanding, not according to delegated experts in their fields. Thompson exemplifies independent reasoning, reflection and clear presence, at times. His voice is not an academic one, nor purely journalistic, and not solely fictional. Instead Thompson combines the rhetorics and strategies of these three fields, and provides a different point of entry into the understanding and exploration of social norms and traditions. His strategy exposes absurdity in human endeavours and interests, and shows how the civilised America of the times is actually one big carnival where plays of possession and power rule the day. This aspect is effectuated by observational deductions, observations that require some playful opposition in order to counteract these social tendencies.

The next passage I have chosen that reflects how voices are affected by the social context, is found in the article Thompson wrote on Jean-Claude Killy, a world-champion French skier turned American culture -hero working for Chevrolet. Thompson is supposed to make a simple sketch of the French athlete who has become the promotional face of the Chevrolet Company. Instead, Thompson draws a picture of a man that is out of context, but

111 Edward W. Said. 'Audiences, Constituencies, and Community'. *Critical Inquiry*. Volume 9, No. 1, The Politics of Interpretation (Sep., 1982), pp1-26. (c) Published by: The University of Chicago Press. Web. Accessed October 14, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343271> .p2

who has learned to accept his money-making qualities, and is intent on continuing his career as such:

'Jean-Claude had been there- to that rare high place where only the snow leopards live; and now, twenty-six years old with more dollars that he can use or count, there is nothing else to match those peaks he has already beaten. Now it is all downhill for the world's richest ski bum. He was good enough-and lucky- for a while, to live in that win-loose,black-white, do-or-die world of the international super TV athlete.[...] But now, with nothing else to win, he is down on the killing floor with the rest of us-sucked into strange and senseless wars on unfamiliar terms; haunted by a sense of loss that no amount of money can ever replace; mocked by the cotton-candy rules of a mean game that still awes him...locked into a gilded life-style where winning means keeping his mouth shut and reciting, on cue, from other men's scripts. This is Jean-Claude Killy's new world: He is a handsome middle-class French boy who trained hard and learned to ski so well that now his name is immensely saleable on the marketplace of a crazily inflated culture-economy that eats its heroes like hotdogs and honours them on about the same level.'¹¹²

In this example of the polyglot strategy in Thompson's narrative, it is he-the journalist, who speaks with the subject and reflects on the context in which Killy performs. In the article, Thompson refers to his strategy when assessing interview objects and those confound Killy for the reason that he expects straight questions that require straightforward answers. The alienation of natural man in an unnatural state is here juxtaposed with Killy's origins, and even though his career as an athlete was cynical in its creation of an idol, the Frenchman is presented here as living in a state of mind that is cut off from his original self, albeit self-chosen. Killy represents an individual who is willingly possessed, though for lack of options, by the play of existence that is a main factor within the world of publicity. It is Thompson the writer who brings out the contradiction in Killy, choosing to inquire into the person behind the façade. From the realisation of these two in essence radically different modes of being, the result is alienation and confusion, leading to, in Killy's case, to a state of being that appears numb and passive in the sketch that Thompson makes of him. This example reveals the negative carnivalesque aspect nurtured in modern society, where artificial structures entertain and create the belief for its viewers and recipients that modern civilised society is really festive and liberating, especially if one acquires physical objects. Robert Stam evaluates the power of the media in terms of carnivalesque pleasures:

'The appeal of the mass media derives partially from their capacity for relaying, in a degraded manner, the distant cultural memory (or the vague future hope) of carnival. The mass media thus offer insipid, enervated, co-optable forms of carnival; they capitalize on the frustrated desire for a truly egalitarian

¹¹² Hunter S. Thompson. 'The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy, in *Scanlan's Monthly*, vol 1, no. 1, March 1970.' in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980. p102

society by serving up distorted versions of its utopian promise. As if to compensate for a general loss of communitarian pleasure, the mass media constantly offer the simulacra of carnival-style festivity. But that is hardly the same thing as offering carnival itself, or even of using carnivalesque strategies, for carnival is participatory, joyfully critical, and potentially subversive.¹¹³

Against the realisation of this backdrop, Thompson's work serves to elucidate these mechanisms in society in a rather pessimistic tone, and the shock value in this example lies in the understanding that modern society delivers inflated images of wealth and happiness, and that the state of being that Thompson describes for Killy, does not stand for real achievement and prosperity, and should not be sought after as a remedy for the feeling of emptiness, internal as well as external. I included an example resonating with this aspect in *Fear and Loathing*, where people were tempted to pay next to nothing to appear on a giant neon lit screen looking over Las Vegas. This emphasizes that Killy's example is not unique in the selling of hollow images. Thompson's position stands here for the antidote to hollow values, thus injecting optimism into the bleak picture of empty values.

The next example that speaks of a dialogue with the modern context is found in Thompson's conversations with hobos and drifters. In the final passage of this article, Thompson reflects upon the changing conditions of working men and women, to whom the life-style alternatives in a modern society are decreasing with the changing of the times:

'Maybe so, I thought, but I hope I don't have to pick you up in ten years when they've really tightened the screws, because the day of the boomer is rapidly coming to an end. In the age of automation and job security, a touch of wanderlust is the kiss of death. In any count of the chronically unemployed the boomers will be very prominent; they have never sought security, but only work; they have never saved, but only earned and spent- participating, as it were, in an increasingly technological economy that has less and less room for their sort with every passing year. When we got to Pierre I dropped the young optimist and his blue plastic suitcase on the south side of town. He got out in the middle of a small dust storm and pointed his thumb towards Los Angeles. I returned to the Holiday Inn- where they have a swimming pool and air-conditioned rooms- to consider the paradox of a nation that has given so much to those who speak the glories of rugged individualism from the securities of countless corporate sinecures, and so little to that diminishing band of yesterday's refugees who still practise it, day by day, in a tough, rootless and sometimes witless style that most of us have long since been weaned away from.'¹¹⁴

Of course, today in 2014, wanderlust adventurers have found their way to make a

113 Robert Stam. *Subversive Pleasures- Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989. p92

114 Hunter S. Thompson. 'Living in the time of Alger, Greeley, Debs – Old-Time Boomers Still Stomp the West, but Air-Conditioning's Better in National Observer, 13 July 1964.' in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980. p400

living by making use of specialised knowledge and the interest in small narratives, by working alongside the technological economy. But the reflections on the boomers in this article is resonant with the changing of the tides as it was perceived in 1964 by Thompson, where wanderlust is presented as a life lived in simplicity and exploration of inner desires and aspirations. Thompson positions himself in this narrative presentation of real-life examples as one who has the *savoir-faire* to refrain from the urge to drop out, for the characteristics of his persona, as the narrator and a character that links all these lives and situations together, suggests that Thompson would otherwise consider to drop out of the alienating sides of technological and capitalist society. Speaking with those who still cling on to a life-style on the road, puts them in a larger social and political context, but it also lends them an ear and thereby admits them agency, which the changing society has removed from them.

Bakhtin reflects upon the aspect of the human image in the Greek Romance, which bears resemblance with the image of essential qualities in man that Thompson seeks to understand, with the narrative devices that he makes use of to describe his personal observations:

'Characteristically it is not private life that is subjected to and interpreted in light of social and political events, but rather the other way around- social and political events gain meaning in the novel thanks to their connection with private life. And such events are illuminated in the novel only insofar as they relate to private fates; their essence as purely social and political events remains outside the novel.

Thus, the public and rhetorical unity of the human image is to be found in the contradiction between it and its purely private content.'¹¹⁵

This quote from the *Dialogic Imagination* resonates with this example, although Thompson refers to the political and social context as a background to why these boomers have a difficult future ahead. By including this passage I mean to demonstrate literally how Thompson aims to reflect upon and shed light on the tight bond between cultural activity, life-style choices and core values that are challenged by the influences in external reality. Even those who choose to lead a detached way of life will eventually face the challenges within technological society that in this particular example promotes stability and predictability in terms of residence and occupation. Bakhtin suggests in this quote that it is through the representation of people's situation that one can fully realise the implications and consequences of social and political realities. It thus shows how inseparable private and official lives are, and how separated they have become in the explanation of men's and

115 M.M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination- Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. pp109,110

women's inner realities. In other words, public and inner lives have lost their connection somewhere around the rise of modernist, capitalist and technological society. Thompson's moralistic tone here also suggests that manoeuvrability in social spheres is required in order to respond to the changing times. He, the writer and background persona in these articles, managed to find a way to seek adventures through his journalistic endeavours, and so represents an active and conscious approach to the enactment of personal will and desires, alongside the system, while questioning the system simultaneously.

Thompson's writing strategies to a great extent comment on the situation of the self, as in this polyglot example, where he comments on the vulnerabilities of the concept of individual choices in the face of a larger entity, the society and its social structures. These three examples together express nostalgia to when civilised society was more transparent, to when external influences did not make people compromise themselves to artificial boundaries and superficial life-style choices. This was also the case with the Angels, and to a certain extent Duke and the Samoan attorney, who did not recognise themselves in the new scheme of things. Certainly, glorifying the past is not too objective, but the novelty of modern society involves synthetic structures to relate to in addition. After all, these are also stories stemming from the reality of advanced modern societies, only they are not referred to in the established ideal.

4.2 Satirising political strategies.

The following examples from the variety of satirical outbursts of Thompson vary from ironical and hilarious, to the point of being dark and heavily critical of the observations of deep-felt issues that should not prevail much longer, but have a strong hold in the national psyche. The first example I will provide that demonstrates Thompson's use of satire to invite a reassessment of the social roles and responsibilities, and not to mention the new approach to engaging otherwise mute voices, stems from Thompson's actual campaign to become the Sheriff in Aspen, of which I will present the political platform with which he reached out to the voters:

TENTATIVE PLATFORM

THOMPSON FOR SHERIFF

ASPEN, COLORADO, 1970

1. Sod the streets at once. Rip up all streets with jackhammers and use the junkasphalt (after melting) to create a huge parking and auto-storage lot on the outskirts of town-preferably somewhere out of sight, like between the new sewage plant and McBride's new shopping centre. All refuse and other garbage

could be centralized in this area- in memory of Mrs. Walter Paepke, who sold the land for development.[...] 2.Change the name 'Aspen', by public referendum, to 'Fat City'.[...] What effect the name-change might have on those who came here to buy low, sell high and move on is fairly obvious...and eminently desirable. 3. Drug sales must be controlled.[...] Non-profit sales will be viewed as borderline cases, and judged on their merits. But all sales for money-profit will be punished severely. 4. Hunting and fishing should be forbidden to all non-residents,[...] By this approach- we would create a sort of de facto game preserve, without the harsh restrictions that will necessarily be forced on us if these bloodthirsty geeks keep swarming in here each autumn to shoot everything they see. 5. The sheriff and his deputies should never be armed in public.[...] The whole notion of disarming the police is to lower the level of violence-while guaranteeing, at the same time, a terrible punishment to anyone stupid enough to attempt violence on an un-armed cop.6. It will be the policy of the sheriff's office savagely to harass all those engaged in any form of land-rape.'¹¹⁶

The tentative platform is simultaneously playful while indignant in its message, through which Thompson turns the local political system topsy-turvy, with no regard to economical progress, only to the well-being of the residents. The written performance in the article gets amplified by the fact that this actually happened, and the fact that Thompson for Sheriff actually came close to winning. Thompson's persona represents the self who actively plays with established social structures, and performs a reality that is responding to the dominant mode. As opposed to the letting go of social constraints in *Fear and Loathing*, Thompson here uses established social structures to re-build a space where social conditioning is more in tune with his own personal ideals. The satirical quality lies in what the otherness implies of the standard approach in local politics, resonating with the mirroring of the subdued self in the guise of a liberated and free enactment of individual ideology and aspiration. In this case, the guise was serious and with the intention to follow it through. The satire resonates with the qualities of Mennipean Satire, as I have looked into in previous chapters, and the following characteristics explains how the Mennipea shows itself in the narrative:

'Bakhtin posits a number of 'essential traits' of the Mennipea: 1.the constant presence of the comic element; 2. an extraordinary freedom of plot and philosophical invention; 3. an emphasis on the adventures of an idea in its passage through the world; 4. the fusion of the fantastic, the symbolic, and slum naturalism; 5.the foregrounding of philosophical universalism and 'ultimate questions'; 6. a three-planed structure involving heaven,earth and hell; 7. a fondness for the experimental and the fantastic; 8. an emphasis on moral-psychological experimentation, split personality, insanity, and abnormal psychic states showing the 'unfinalizability of man' and his 'noncoincidence with himself'; 9. a fondness for scandal and violations of decorum; 10. a love of sharp contrasts and oxymoronic combinations; 11.

¹¹⁶ Hunter S.Thompson, 'Freak Power in the Rockies, in *Rolling Stone* no.67, 1.Oct 1970.' in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980.pp184,185,186

elements of social utopia; 12. the wide use of inserted genres; 13. a polystylistic language and approach; and 14. overt and hidden polemics with various philosophical, religious, and ideological schools and mockery of 'masters of thought'.¹¹⁷

Nearly all of these traits are to be found in 'Freak Power in the Rockies', and these traits affect the text by creating the doubt of whether it is serious or not, or just entertainment to provoke those who still believe in the sanctity and universality of the judicial laws. The satire is entertaining while at the same time it reflects on the incentive for such initiative. The Menippean Satire is in Thompson's works and articles presented through the voice of the rogue, clown and the fool-the edgy one as such- and the trickster, personified by Thompson. His role as the rogue trickster is a recurring device of his to shake the establishment, exemplified in his choice to seek out the real deal with the Angels, and his anti-authoritarian position in Las Vegas, and again in this example, where he is using conventional means to challenge the power of state hypocrisy overriding peoples' needs and desires. However, his function as the trickster persona in this example, who brings all these aspects of society to attention, is an attempt to social empowerment in addition to opposition and ridicule. Through laughter and carnivalisation Thompson grabs the scene and promotes his ideals, as Bakhtin explains of his role:

'Opposed to convention and functioning as a force for exposing it, we have the level-headed, cheery and clever wit of the rogue (in the form of a villain, a petty townsman-apprentice, a young itinerant cleric, a tramp belonging to no class), the parodied taunts of the clown and the simpleminded incomprehension of the fool. Opposed to ponderous and gloomy deception we have the rogue's cheerful deceit; opposed to greedy falsehood and hypocrisy we have the fool's unselfish simplicity and his healthy failure to understand; opposed to everything that is conventional and false, we have the clown- a synthetic form for the (parodied) exposure of others.'¹¹⁸

The attempt to seize political power in Aspen comes across as a critique of the priorities in policies that seem to make way for the increase of material wealth and strong protection over this, rather than secure a social ambience where people collectively carry out social responsibilities for the benefit of the society. Through a carnivalesque approach, Thompson plays with the opportunity for a different set of goals that will make 'Fat City' a good place for its inhabitants and not for corporations and the tourism-industry to flourish.

Graham Matthews explains to us how satire moves the border of absolutism: 'Rather than presenting satire as a unified moral agency, it should be seen as a fallen form that

117 Robert Stam. *Subversive Pleasures- Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989. p97,98

118 M.M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination- Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p162

presents the obscene underside of the social relation for inspection. In doing so, it disrupts the dialectic of margin and centre and constitutes a subversion of the spherical world view.¹¹⁹

This quote shows how the last example can effectuate such a disruption concerning an absolutist view on how to maintain a flourishing society, and also to disrupt any notions of a stable and unified social experience in the following example.

I will move to Cuzco in Peru, where Thompson paints an image of an ancient people who are today left out of the grand equation, whose presence is undermined and under-valued. This example shows Thompson's tendency to look closer into topics that are concerned with inhibitions imposed on men and women, inhibitions that keep the potential of true expression and liberty in a stronghold, so as to keep the status quo intact and stable, but to whom?:

'When the cold Andean dusk comes down on Cuzco, the waiters hurry to shut the venetian blinds in the lounge of the big hotel in the middle of town. They do it because the Indians come up on the stone porch and stare at the people inside. It tends to make tourists uncomfortable, so the blinds are pulled. The tall, oak-panelled room immediately seems more cheerful.[...]Last fall in Ecuador, a sanitation unit from the UN-sponsored Andean Indian Mission was attacked by Indians who'd been told the men were 'Communist Agents'. A doctor and his assistant were killed, and the doctor's body was burned.[...]The example of Bolivia has shown that once the Indian begins voting, he has little common cause with large landowning or industrial interests. Thus the best hope for the status quo is to keep the Indian ignorant, sick, poverty-stricken, and politically impotent.'¹²⁰

This rather bleak picture of failed progress and even the indirect subduing of a people, while closing the blinds so that others will not have to be bothered by them is yet another reason to break out of the invisible chains that bind people. The Indians' culture and traditions resonate slightly with the situation of the aforementioned boomers, by which they encounter a world that is leaving them behind. But what is expressed in this journalistic observation is the tendency of larger and abstract forces that include or exclude for the benefit of the system. To such a grim situation, a reassessment is required, and that is to forge a new strategy to cope with the grim realities of power interests. The situation of the Indians of Peru and Bolivia is consistent with Thompson's tendency to let the struggles or simply situations of communities to project the struggles of any individual, and vice-versa, often as the result of economical and political oppression leading to social alienation. The example resonates with the social exclusion dealt with in *Hell's Angels*, but the degree of exclusion and oppression in this example serves to emphasize the distance between the margin and the centre, only on a global

119 Graham Matthews. *Ethics and Desire in the Wake of Postmodernism – Contemporary Satire*. London: Continuum Literary Studies, 2012. p16

120 Hunter S. Thompson. 'The Inca of the Andes: He haunts the ruins of his once-great empire', *National Observer*; 10 June 1963', in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980. pp379,380,381

scale and thus far more indicative of the difference in the delegation of individuals' control over their own choices in relation to society.

By looking at Thompson's work as a whole, I see that these themes recur again and again, and the Carnival lenses through which I read Thompson and from which he presents his observations, sets in motion the subversive will to alter the perspective and to look again at what goes on. Thompson's role in this article is minimal, but his persona precedes his own writing, in retrospect, and Thompson's wearing of the mask as a rogue full of indignation affects the reception of his literary subjects:

'In the struggle against conventions, and against the inadequacy of all available life-slots to fit an authentic human being, these masks take on an extraordinary significance. They grant the right not to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right not to be taken literally, not 'to be oneself'; the right to live a life in the chronotope of the entr'acte, the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act life as a comedy and to treat others as actors, the right to rip off masks, the right to rage at others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage- and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets.'¹²¹

The examples I have provided up until now seem to reflect this rage, the impetus to act out comically, to see the world in the light of one big carnival, both negative and positive, to present the need for a more authentic world- one that encourages people to express themselves and act freely and without restrictions. As I have commented upon previously regarding satire, these examples prompt the realisation that societies based on shame tend to nurture and even create feelings of oppression. The ideal in Thompson's works that is seldom addressed or suggested, is that to be able to live freely and without social restriction could actually lower the outrage within people, and limit the tendency to create synthetic spheres where people are excluded and stigmatised. As Thompson wrote in the previous passage, were the Indians encouraged to vote they would probably not vote for people whose interests were dramatically different than their own. The tone is here rather Juvenalian than Menippean, for the bleak image of the state of the world shows little other than pessimism and controlled rage in the rhetoric of neutral observation. The short comment on how wealthier tourists are protected from this reality makes the story into a bitter one. Seen in comparison with Thompson's later works, his extravagant and excessive behaviour seems to have been prompted by his earlier discoveries as a journalist, but the thematic approach is the same. Back in the States, the situation is not much more promising, and the scene is Nixon's

121 M.M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogic Imagination- Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holmquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p163

inauguration as the president:

'In any case, the battle is joined...Revolution versus the wave of the past. Rumours persist that Mr. Nixon remains confident- for reasons not apparent to anyone under fifty, except cops, evangelists and members of the liberty lobby. The rest of us will have to start reading fiction again, or maybe build boats. The demands of this growing polarization- this banshee screaming 'Which side are you on?' - are going to make the Johnson years seem like a peace festival.[...] On Monday night, around dusk, I went back to the big circus tent that had been the scene, just twenty hours earlier of MOBE's counter-inaugural ball. On Sunday night the tent had been a mob scene, with thousands of laughing young dissident smoking grass and bouncing balloons around in the flashing glare of strobe lights and rock music.[...] As the tent disappeared, piece by piece, young girls with long hair and boys carrying rucksacks drifted by and stopped to watch. They had come back, like me, half-expecting to find something happening. We stood there for a while, next to the Washington Monument...nobody talking, not even the tent-company crew...and then we drifted off in different directions. It was cold and getting colder. I zipped up my ski jacket and walked across the Mall. To my left, at the base of the monument, a group of hippies was passing the joint around...and off to the right a mile or so away. I could see the bright dome of the Capitol...Mr. Nixon's Capitol.'¹²²

This passage speaks of failed hope and a sense of futile opposition: Of forces that exist side by side who do not communicate properly, of separate worlds, of uncertainty. The effect of this passage is to put focus on the existence of a dominant narrative, and also, the existence of several smaller narratives, side by side with the conventional understanding of how things work. The carnivalesque act has been deemed futile and confirms the real centre by some, and this satirical example shows exactly this aspect, amplified with the incredulity of a political dissident personified by Thompson. Stam situates carnival expressions as inflected by historical moments:

'All carnivals must be seen as complex crisscrossings of ideological manipulations and utopian desire. The Bakhtinian view in this sense, perhaps tends to overestimate the political efficacy of real-life carnivals, as if carnivals operated in abstraction from the 'institutional sites in which the complex relations of discourse and power are actually negotiated.' As 'situated utterances,' carnivals are inserted into specific historical moments and are inevitably inflected by the hierarchical arrangements of everyday social life.'¹²³

The political demonstration in this example cannot be separated from the established sites of discourse, but I would rather draw the conclusion that even though these utterances are arguing within and derived of established modes of power, the opposition manages to destabilise the image of a unified agreement over values and social methods. Since I am not

122 Hunter S. Thompson. 'Memoirs of a wretched weekend in Washington, *Boston Globe*, 23 Februar 1969.' in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980. pp193,194

123 Robert Stam. *Subversive Pleasures- Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989. p96

referring to actual festivals, but rather seeing the modern condition as carrying carnivalesque components in everyday life, I argue that the dominant centre needs to uphold and stabilise the discontent from the margins, since the elected powers can never be fully secure about their positions. In this sense, the bleak picture gains more texture. It follows as a historical fact that Nixon was after all responsible for the Watergate affair. In this respect, the real life carnival, where everybody participates one way or another, is a constant negotiation over limits and borders, values and ideas. Where Thompson manages to opt for more liberal ethics and morals in terms of the social sphere trespassing individual social and spiritual manoeuvrability, lies in the realisation of the hold the dominant narrative exerts over definitions of high and low, ins and outs. Thompson's revolt in writing is nuanced in its conviction, reaching out to contextual consciousness, writing and performing for the oppositional side of the social scene in 1963, 1969, and 1970.

4.3 Targeting grotesque conventions.

Thompson employs the grotesque effortlessly in his writing, almost to an extent that his convictions and intentions are best played out grotesquely rather than subtly, as was also the tendency in 1960s literature, to shock people into realising the real obscenities being exerted in polite society, as quoted by Cmiel in the beginning of the second chapter. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* the grotesque enactments were impulsive responses to a deep felt distance from social values and illusions, and in *Hell's Angels* the grotesque masks and acts were a strategy the Angels used to own the labels that had been appointed to them and therefore to perform the role of criminal deviants thereafter.

In *The Great Shark Hunt*, however, the following two examples express different issues; the first deals with sanctioned craziness, and how Thompson sets out to find the southern stereotype he grew up with, intolerant and stuck in its own cemented traditions; and in the second we meet again Acosta, the -in real life- Chicano lawyer, who plays with established judicial structures and uses them against the selfsame structure. Both are written in a playful mood, with aggressive and violent undertones. These two differ from the two other books in that the grotesque are in these situations used as deliberate means to actively shock and disturb the agreed upon establishment.

In accordance with Kathryn Hume, the grotesque challenges the notion of absolute meaning, and in the following examples this is the target:

'Meaning, after all, frequently comes from predictable form, both in plots and in physical shape; it relies

on firm boundaries. The grotesque exists to break patterns, in particular the pattern of what it is to be human. When that pattern is no longer predictable, we have to make our own meaning, or learn to live without.[...], the grotesque encourages active thinking about our life assumptions.'¹²⁴

The following examples of Thompson's use of the grotesque in his fictional journalism thus repel the reader in different ways, ranging from the thoughtless excessive and vulgar behaviour of others, to a conscious re-enactment of deviant behaviour. The following excerpts from Thompson's articles together create a notion of the American carnivalesque as an embodiment of the absurdity of the modern condition, where the need to find new ways of social assessments is so tangible that if the social pressures would ease down, modern human would be freer to live at ease with the realities of the fragmented post-modern world of the day. Presenting grotesque aspects from everyday life, serves to create some afterthought, to encourage a necessary active thinking about established assumptions, as coined by Hume.

The piece that made Thompson renowned for the Gonzo take on social events is his coverage of a southern traditional Derby, where people from afar join in on the festivities. The grotesque excessiveness that is a traditional part of the celebration during the Derby, prompts a few interesting reflections, in relation to excessive behaviour enacted by social deviants. Thompson offers his reflections in a playful mood, mocking the grotesque mannerisms during the traditional event, but playing along with it and even expressing delight in the officially established crazed outburst. 'The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved' is full on characterised by Gonzo aspects, in which Thompson's own deranged voice had fully developed:

"That whole thing," I said, "will be jammed with people; fifty thousand or so, and most of them staggering drunk. It's a fantastic scene- thousands of people fainting, crying, copulating, trampling each other and fighting with broken whiskey bottles. We'll have to spend some time out there, but it's hard to move around, too many bodies." "Is it safe out there? Will we ever come back?" "Sure," I said. "We'll just have to be careful not to step on anybody's stomach and start a fight." I shrugged. "Hell, this clubhouse scene right below us will be almost as bad as the infield. Thousands of raving, stumbling drunks, getting angrier and angrier as they lose more and more money.[...] The aisles will be slick with vomit; people falling down and grabbing at your legs to keep from being stomped. Drunks pissing on themselves in the betting lines. Dropping handfuls of money and fighting to stoop over and pick it up."¹²⁵

This passage creates an image of sanctioned festivities where the norm is to go completely off limits for the time of the duration of the Derby. The idea of sanctioned play

124 Kathryn Hume. *Aggressive fictions- Reading the Contemporary American Novel*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2012. p166

125 Hunter S. Thompson. 'The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved' in *Scanlan's Monthly*, Vol.1, no. 4, June 1970, in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980. p35

resonates with the concept of cultural time-pockets of carnival as a festival, where normal social structures are turned up-side down. It follows then that what goes on during carnival is therefore an exception from the conventional status quo, in order to provide a release from the rigid structures from everyday life. The satirical intent inherent in the employment of the grotesque description, emphasizes the formality in the temporal release from social boundaries. In its transgression, the boundaries are still kept intact, for there is no active thinking on anything during the festivities. This brings up reflections on personal freedom, and Matthews interprets the distinction between formal and actual freedom: 'Indeed, Slavoj Zizek differentiates between two forms of freedom: ' formal freedom is the freedom of choice within the coordinates of the existing power relations, while actual freedom designates the site of an intervention that undermines these very coordinates.'¹²⁶

This example is a realisation of this distinction, however within satire, but it also distinguishes Thompson's varied use of the grotesque as a mode of nuanced representation. In terms of the excessive decadence during the modern day Kentucky Derby, Thompson describes the contemporary carnival, where inhibition and primal desires get their release from the otherwise conventional- ridden modern society, where money and social connections rule the day. But it also emphasizes Thompson's use of the themes to simultaneously criticise society's effect on peoples' choices and assumptions, but he celebrates the hilarity of the modern social condition in its absurdity, and demonstrates a mode of thinking that does not hold on to meaning as an end-result. Krzychylkiewicz further interprets the rise of the modern grotesque as a primal condition of modern man:

'Mc Elroy's basic assertion is that 'the grotesque is not only a real mode of life but the only real mode once modern life has been correctly perceived.' He points out that it is 'not merely an assault upon the idea of a rational world; it is an assault upon the reader himself, upon his sensibilities, upon his ideals, upon his feeling of living in a friendly familiar world or his desire to live in one.' It is an aggressive mode and provides an outlet for the emotional confusion of modern man. The centre stage in modern grotesque literature is given to a 'repugnant' individual, 'a humiliated man' – an 'anti-hero', whose actions are animated not by reason but by his degenerate nature, for as Mc Elroy asserts, 'perversity, not reason, is the basis of human character.'¹²⁷

Thompson describes the Derby- scene with humour, thereby creating an atmosphere of craziness in the socially sanctioned primal outbursts of otherwise 'respectable' citizens,

126 Graham Matthews. *Ethics and Desire in the Wake of Postmodernism – Contemporary Satire*. London: Continuum Literary Studies, 2012. p29

127 Agata Krzychylkiewicz. 'Towards the understanding of the modern grotesque.' *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19.2 (June 2003):pp 205-228. (c) COPYRIGHT 2003 Literator Society of South Africa. Web. Accessed May 14,2014. <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=g792506515~tab=summary> p218

unproblematic to compare with the enactments of labelled deviants. In the article, Thompson writes that he, and Ralph Steadman- the British caricaturist, are searching for the ultimate image to represent that state of play during the Derby:

'But the breeding of humans is not so wisely supervised, particularly in a narrow Southern society where the closest kind of inbreeding is not only stylish and acceptable, but far more convenient- to the parents- than setting their offspring free to find their own mates, for their own reasons and in their own ways. ('Goddamn, did you hear about Smitty's daughter? She went crazy in Boston last week and married a nigger!') So the face I was trying to find in Churchill Downs that weekend was a symbol, in my own mind, of the whole doomed atavistic culture that makes the Kentucky Derby what it is.'¹²⁸

Only to discover:

'For a confused instant I thought that Ralph had brought somebody with him- a model for that one special face we'd been looking for. There he was, by God- a puffy, drink ravaged, disease-ridden caricature... like an awful cartoon version of an old snapshot in some once-proud mother's family album. It was the face we'd been looking for- and it was, of course, my own. Horrible, horrible...'¹²⁹

The text that is filled with grotesque descriptions, satirical indictments, but also self-parodic elements, reads therefore as an honest evaluation of the times in its self-reflexivity, amplifying the authenticity of Thompson's recap of the event. The modern carnival is by the descriptions that Thompson makes, a socially condensed vacuum, where one does as best as one possibly can to be able to manoeuvre oneself through the totality of norms, from the hypocritical self-illusions to absurd expectancies and straight out uninformed judgements of how things should be. The result is the sometimes crazy outbursts of a wild chase for instant euphoria.

The following is the second and last example I will provide of Thompson's use of the grotesque to amplify his social commentary. Reflecting upon Matthews' mention of the subtle differences in the term freedom, the next example resonates with 'actual freedom', although in its expression only, by a challenging intervention that disrupts the idea of a tight convention. In this story we are introduced again to the character of Oscar Zeta Acosta, allegedly the Samoan attorney in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, but in reality an eccentric Chicano lawyer:

'Oscar used acid like other lawyers use valium- a distinctly unprofessional and occasionally nasty habit that shocked even the most liberal of his colleagues and frequently panicked his clients. I was with him one night in LA, when he decided that the only way to meaningfully communicate with a judge who'd been leaning on him in the courtroom was to drive out to the man's home in Santa Monica and set his

128 Hunter S. Thompson. 'The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved' in *Scanlan's Monthly*, Vol.1, no. 4, June 1970, in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980. p36

129 Ibid. p42

whole front lawn on fire after soaking it down with ten gallons of gasoline...and then, instead of fleeing into the night like some common lunatic vandal, Oscar stood in the street and howled through the flames at a face peering out from a shattered upstairs window, delivering one of his Billy Sunday style sermons on morality and justice. The nut of his flame-enraged text, as I recall, was the mind-bending chunk of eternal damnation from Luke xi, 46 – a direct quote from Jesus Christ: 'And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers, for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.' The lawn of fire was Oscar's answer to the Ku Klux Klan's burning cross, and he derived the same demonic satisfaction from doing it.' Did you see his face?' he shouted as we screeched off at top speed towards Hollywood. 'That corrupt old fool! I know he recognized me but he'll never admit it! No officer of the court would set a judge's front yard on fire- the whole system would break down if lawyers could get away with crazy shit like this.'¹³⁰

In this excerpt, Thompson's summary of the event involves the use of several references according to established signs and signifiers, loaded symbols and holy texts, making the storytelling into a cacophony of ideas that work on each other. The hilarity in the situation is hard to miss, as well as the gravity of its implications. The fact that Thompson describes Acosta committing a serious offence against a representative of the judicial system, regarded and supposed to be above personal indictments, and laughing joyfully at the confrontation made under the radar is shocking and appalling, and yet, Acosta manages to point a serious finger at the inherent hypocrisy in the idea of an institution representing unconditional truth and justice, of which the examples in this thesis and throughout Thompson's literary career is proven impossible if not hard to achieve. The gravity and appalling aspect in this act, and scene, lies in the emotional response triggered by the incongruity of the relationship between the law, and one of its employers, and that there is actually some long awaited and necessary retaliation in the offence committed by the agent of the law. Acosta makes in this excerpt no compromises with his ideals, and performs, as the modern rogue trickster, his opposition against flawed mechanisms actively and deliberately, not caving in to internal incoherence but as resistance. As opposed to disrupting the idea of respectable sensibility of limits of sane expression in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, as the Samoan attorney, or having let go social constraints by pulling out teeth to confirm absurd, but familiar, otherness, in 'Smackey Jack's' persona in *Hell's Angels*, this grotesque enactment reads differently. Acosta deliberately disrupts to provoke a desired change.

The effect of the alleged reference to a real incident becomes ambiguous in the not knowing if this really happened or if it only happened on paper, and in the event of it being

130 Hunter S. Thompson. 'The Banshee screams for Buffalo meat' in *Rolling Stone* no. 254, 15 December 1977, in *The Great Shark Hunt*. London: Picador, 1980. pp533,534

only fiction, it becomes a literary experiment about the limits of social behaviour. Having appropriated the interpretive mode of the carnivalesque, and the literary aspects that emphasize and unveil the social lining during times of the carnivalesque, is the aforementioned trickster figure who creates doubt about cultural rationale. Acosta functions in this episode as the bringer of chaos, the disturber of peace and the status quo. Raney Stanford describes the trickster in 20th century literature as the anti-hero gone hero:

'Here, then in the midst of the twentieth-century complex of cultural values, ideologies and methods for exploiting others and deluding one's self, is the age old quest of the hero for truth about the self and society. Though this hero denies, as all modern heroes do, that he is anything like heroic--'I no hero, but short and dark with only a certain eloquence and the bottomless capacity for being a fool to mark me from the rest'(p.422)--yet he precisely is one, because he comes to see through the unnecessary and absurd illusions of himself and others.'¹³¹

The personality as the rogue gone searching for the essence of genuine assessment, and the rogue's approach to the meaning of essential freedom from constraints goes particularly well with this example, and it resonates well with Thompson's own approach to the events in which he features as a character. The trickster is also aware of and reacts to the futility in agreeing upon an existence that is contextual at best, but an agreement that depends on and is susceptible to the context that has convinced most people, and while this is not so illogical, the trickster shows the corruption of ideas and values where they are not normally discussed. Krzychylkiewicz interprets the grotesque to work on the reader by undermining established preconceptions of what is definite, as does Acosta in this excerpt:

'From the aesthetic point of view, the grotesque work violently resists the classical concepts of beauty, order and harmony, introducing what is uniquely its own, based on ambivalence, incongruity and the strange coexistence of inherently incompatible elements.[...]Thus, what was said about the aesthetic code being affected by the grotesque applies also to the ethical attributes of the universe created, for by its very essence the grotesque undermines concepts as ideal justice, elevated wisdom, eternal happiness and an orderly universe.'¹³²

The example with Acosta serves to exemplify this realisation, and the trickster functions in the story to shake up the status quo, and manages to ridicule the system while ridiculing himself. The example is grotesque in essence, by creating doubts as to the ideal of

¹³¹Raney Stanford. 'The Return of the Trickster: When a not-a-hero is a hero.' *The journal of popular culture*, Volume 1, Issue 3, pages 228-243, Winter 1967. Article first published online: 5 Mars 2004. Web. Accessed May 15, 2014. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1967.0103_228.x/abstract;jsessionid=B8D1A0227DADD6973BE35B4CADB8B16D.f03t02 . p236

¹³²Agata Krzychylkiewicz. '*Towards the understanding of the modern grotesque*.' *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19.2 (June 2003):pp 205-228. (c) COPYRIGHT 2003 Literator Society of South Africa. Web. Accessed May 14, 2014. <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=g792506515~tab=summary> .p222

justice in this example. Acosta's refusing to behave like a 'common lunatic vandal' and run, also disrupts the concept of order and harmony- for he does not admit to having broken any norms that were not necessary to break. The grotesque enactment addresses the system rather than responding to it in this example. In *Hell's Angels* the grotesque came across the deviant subculture's liberating enactment of their stigmatized reception, thereby deliberately disrupting ideas of order and harmony next to civilized society as a response. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* the observation of normalized hypocrisy and maintenance of inflated egos observed by two drug dilettantes on a mad-cap binge, set in motion grotesque inner reactions and similar responses to the perceived emptiness by grotesquely overriding the emotional impact through their grotesque behaviour and interpretations.

In this last example in *The Great Shark Hunt*, through Acosta, Thompson brings here the effects of polyglossia, satire and the grotesque into this final passage at once, thereby emphasizing these three theme's common connection to the analysis of the carnivalesque society that Thompson narrates in his works. Therefore the last example in this thesis serves, in its grotesque transgression of sensibilities and order, as a challenge against programmed ideas of coherence in cultural structures, suggesting rather that it is fluid and can be susceptible to discussion, initiated by its structures having been proved inadequate.

That being problematized, it follows that some sort of order and agreed upon ideas are necessary to maintain peace and civilised behaviour, so the issues that Thompson brings up are, as suggested before, celebratory and critical simultaneously, showing how absurd and constricted modern society appears to those who do not buy in to the simplified version of meaningful existence. And by following Krzychylkiewicz's definition of the grotesque as disrupting classical notions of harmony and order, and beauty even, I choose to see Thompson's polyglot and satirical examples in this chapter, and in this entire thesis, as grotesque in their disruption of coherent values and ideals in the 1960's and 70's.

Krzychylkiewicz also reflects on the grotesque author's motivation in his mode of expression:

'Choosing the text of their grotesque work as a mask we may never be certain what the authors' actual views are for the grotesque excuses them from speaking their mind directly.[...] The grotesque work is a work of the rebellious mind that in the process of bold recreation of the familiar world disregards accepted laws of probability, plausibility and conformity. The authors of the grotesque are individualists who appropriate the right to have an individual vision of the world, but might choose to conceal it in the intricate net of other views and voices which constantly echo in their work.'¹³³

133 Agata Krzychylkiewicz. 'Towards the understanding of the modern grotesque.' Journal of Literary Studies. 19.2 (June 2003):pp 205-228. (c) COPYRIGHT 2003 Literator Society of South Africa. Web. Accessed May 14,2014. <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~db=all~content=g792506515~tab=summary> . p222

Thompson's use of self-reflexive humour and parody, alongside his tendency to mock what he perceived as inflated social control over personal activities and life-style choices, led him as a journalist to seek people regarded as anti-social or normal in the eyes of greater society, and to put into fictional representation what he could not express through conventional means of journalism. As to whether he concealed his individual vision behind other views and voices is a different discussion, for his polyglot approach to news-coverage could not be done differently, as he was writing for journals and magazines. But it makes his approach to literary recreation of a familiar world all the more interesting, when I read it as works that are combining journalism with fiction, between covering reality and narrating stories that are connected to an emotional and abstract dimension. *The Great Shark Hunt* offers insight into society's including and excluding structures, hints at the unnatural state of mind imposed on individuals through the changing of the times in the 60s and 70s, and presents people who internalise these contradictions by acting out social revolts, or accepting the temporal spaces for sanctioned indulgence into the vulgar impulses of socialised man and woman. His self-parodic approach also undermines the dogma he himself expresses when airing his opinions. Thompson's role in this collection of articles, or short stories; is as the mediator, the interpreter, the participant, the observer, the trickster and the anti-hero, all enacted differently according to the story that he wrote. He, as the author of these stories, symbolises the embodiment of the multiple qualities inherent in people, and shows that dogmatic categorisation will always come short of the complexities in social beings.

5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have treated Hunter S. Thompson and the American Carnavalesque as a concept, to which I have interpreted *Hell's Angels*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and *The Great Shark Hunt* through the narrative devices Polyglossia, Satire and the Grotesque.

Treated as a concept, the Carnavalesque reading allows the multi-faceted social realities to merge together and to confirm the resemblance between each relative example. The resemblance is grounded in agency, which is a common desire in all, context notwithstanding.

Through these devices, Thompson presents an image of modern society in which exaggeration and sometimes distortion in rhetoric effect flawed mechanisms leading to hypocrisy, inflated ideas and personalities, alienation and hollow values. The dynamic relationship between the ideal and its actuality create the carnivalesque quality of post-modern lived experience. Thompson manages to make a sketch of the cultural psyche permeating social distinctions, and offers his contribution to an alternative, but celebrational understanding of lived experience in the 1960s and 70s.

Thompson performs his writing as a New Journalist, participating in the stories, and mediating what he sees. He also developed his personal Gonzo style during his career; wild, uninhibited, grotesque and provocative, adding to the stories' impact on the reader. In *Fear and Loathing* his Gonzo-persona breaks all proper rules of conduct while putting his experience on paper. Even so, Thompson's own actions are paradoxically liable to be contested, as his voice comes across as genuine and authentic in its self-reflexivity.

Thompson's role in his narratives is to put into words, and act out the extremes of social interaction, and he performs his critical comment with resembling qualities of the trickster figure in some of stories, and as the rogue journalist in the rest of them, who reminds society of its flaws and errors by contesting them through enacting these flaws, or going straight to the source to point out social corruption.

Polyglossia, as a device to go into dialogue with the different contexts and show the inherent affiliation between ideas and enactments, is employed in these books in different manners, to explore different ends of dialogue. In *Hell's Angels*, polyglossia is brought to the fore to ground Thompson's observations in the voices of many, to engage in a democratic discourse, to consult with the average man and woman on the issue of representation. He plays with past and present expressions, to ground the Angels in a social pattern, thus arguing against their anti-social behaviour as a new dangerous element against social stability, in a collage of different styles of representation, to which the Lynch Report seems irrelevant in

comparison. In *Fear and Loathing*, polyglossia is used to establish the departure from conventional representation, and the emotional impact Thompson's persona processes in the face of superficial and mechanical representation of experiences and the self. The examples serve as the rationale behind Duke's developing incentive to opt out of conventional standards. Since this story is autobiographical rather than documentary, Thompson flees into storytelling to represent his experience, shutting out factual reality as he does not want its oversimplifications to interfere with his personal experience. In *The Great Shark Hunt*, Thompson, the new journalist, or rather I, connect these different examples, different in time and geography, together, to let them affect one another, neither with glee nor sensation, but in response to a notion of monoglot experience of life. Thompson redeems this lack of contextual dialogue. In doing so, he adds to the concept of the American Carnavalesque that functions to shock people out of complacent social passiveness.

Thompson employs satire in nearly all of his examples, and it seeps through his dialogues and the examples of the grotesque as well, but the main examples I have chosen are more in tune with how satire is a way of showing society's accepted paradoxes, with the ironical side-glance that reveals the hilarity in them. In *Hell's Angels*, Thompson satirises the reliance on simplified representation, based on respectable sources. Thompson shows with his examples that his scepticism is a response against how discourse is divided in society, and how this division leads to a lack of contextualised understanding. He shows the stigmatisation that rules the day, only reproduces problems, and does not solve them. The aim is different in *Fear and Loathing*. This time it is personal. The satirical examples in this book, all deals with the persona's own reception of the cultural state of mind, and Thompson expresses ironical angst during his stay in the epitome of the American culture. His persona, observing hypocrisy, absurd notions of right and wrong and the blind faith in claimed truth, learns from his observations that the only crime is getting caught. The inner chaos is aligned with a chaotic world, connecting the emotional to the material. In this book, satire deals with corrupted mental ideas, as the persona intuitively receive them. The following chapter, *The Great Shark Hunt*, shows Thompson's satirical glance at the world of politics and, as was his habit, fluctuating between the celebratory and the critical in his short stories. By drawing in global connections, these examples read together reveal the hold of dominant narratives and structures. Thompson shows how politics directly affect individuals and groups, and he does so by engaging mute voices, and presenting the silent aftermath of political influence over the individual. In this thesis, these satirical examples speak of social structures' effect on the

individual through flawed presentation, on the social psyche, and in the political sphere.

Similarly, the grotesque offers challenging images of excessive normalcy, to which the reader response can be dismissive or provoking a new glance at one's own role in society. *Hell's Angels* brought to the fore the performative aspect in the Angels' behaviour, their play on life, in a context where they had little to lose, but agency to win. Their deliberate enactment of deviant behaviour confirmed their social outing, and challenged the scientific taxonomy of social predictability. The grotesque in this book sheds light on how fragile the order of things is, and provides a specific subcultural example of a reality, among many, in the post-modern social carnival. The move from an inwards to outwards perspective in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* raised the stakes of Thompson's social carnival, as the inner rejection of social apathy and conventionality was amplified and authenticated through the autobiographical narrative. The grotesque is used as a narrative device to show both genuine dismissal of inflated social categories, and also a responding opposition against these to create a shock effect. Thompson distinguishes in his texts the difference between formal freedom and liberated freedom, of which his examples describe both. This distinction is also present in *The Great Shark Hunt*, in which the two examples together embody the absurdity in cultural conditioning. Thompson differentiates temporal release from principled release, and disturbs complacent views on established institutions and traditions. Thompson manages through the grotesque to present his reason to undermine established preconceptions of what is definite. Being an anti-hero, he seeks to see through the illusions of himself and of others.

Although the examples in this thesis, in their critique, depict bleak situations of outings, stigmatisation, and convenient outlets, the examples also celebrate the unveiled lack of meaning in cultural structures, for Thompson does not depict the social world as a lost case. Instead, he re-fashions the formerly self-assured view on cultural reasoning into a more level-headed variant of it, less severe and less afraid of variety of expressions. In this respect, Thompson warns that exaggerated social control undermines in the end creativity, the coming together of the mind and the body, openness and curiosity in the face of difference, the cooperation between nature and industrial society, and integrated understandings of the self, or the various selves.

And this is where Thompson's works contain social value; by challenging people to see themselves in the mirror and act on the basis of grounded reflection, to let go of the fear of being challenged by other world-views and to act in such a way that one can rest assured that one's actions can be contested and still stand tall. Thompson manages to show with his use of

rhetoric and narrative devices that social men and women are much more complex in their desires and attitudes than social norms and conventional ideas admit to them, resulting in a world gone mad on all levels. The author act and write in such a way that the madness becomes visible, in him as well as in society, in a perpetual carnivalesque play of life. The post-modern idea of the carnivalesque can carry both positive and negative connotations, but by acknowledging it, which Thompson does in his texts, society and the individual can see social condition for what it is, and that can provoke a positive change of mind set. A general atmosphere in this thesis is thereby what Thompson finds in his observation, a need to redefine meaningful interaction, and the definition of meaning itself. He also plays with the idea of letting the lack of meaning play a more prominent role in social interpretation, for as I quoted from Hiebert in the introduction; by re-iterating meaning, one creates the possibility to re-iterate meaninglessness, and in that process social representation can appear more in tune with social reality.

The American Carnivalesque involves everybody, from top to low in social hierarchies, and Thompson acknowledged this with grotesque humour and informed subjective deductions. Such was Hunter S. Thompson's contribution to social discourse, from which it was dismissed by conventional for a. However, as I have shown in my thesis, much can be learned from alternative views, if only they are acknowledged.

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